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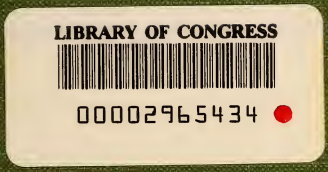

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THE MIDDLE CLASS

BY J. ROSETT

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A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

PHOENIX PUBLISHERS
BALTIMORE

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PREFACE.

We are the contemporaries of a great tragedy: an entire social class—the middle class—is becoming submerged. The tragic phase of this phenomenon is all the more intense because the class which is thus doomed to annihilation occupies the highest intellectual plane in our society.

A drowning man is the most immoral person. He will scramble over the heads of his fellows without a thought; and he will drag down to death the hand which is extended to save him. It is in this circumstance that the gross immoralties of Adams, Jones and Anderson, as well as the gentler transgressions of Mrs. Bensal and Mrs. Jones, find their extenuation. But the same shipwreck which brings into play the primeval instincts of man, also offers the opportunity for the manifestation of his social spirit—hence Beacon, Bensal and others.

The discerning reader will find that the keynote to the plot of the play is borrowed from the biblical Job. See with what facility Dr. Beacon picks up his friend from the quiet and isolation of the laboratory and hurls him into the social whirlpool, there to struggle with the wreckage of the middle class, from which he finally consents to release him—all this not in the spirit of mere wantonness characteristic of a second-rate devil, but with a high purpose in view—and you will discover in Beacon the sublime Satan. Of course,

Satan has here been thoroughly modernized and made to fit Twentieth Century conditions; compared, however, to what Satan has already suffered at the hands of man, his treatment in this play will be found rather mild.

In the same manner I have taken advantage of the plasticity of old Job to make of him Dr. Bensal. Like Job, Bensal receives the harbingers of evil one after another in rapid succession, and with each message finds himself bereft of part of his possessions. Unlike Job, however, the possessions of Dr. Bensal are not material possessions, for he is a poor man, in the worldly sense. Like Job, after having lost all, he finds himself richer and happier than he had been.

The few friends, who have seen the play in manuscript, have uniformly protested against Dr. Bensal when he adjures Miss Clemens: "Stand on your head if you can do no better!" But for the life of me I cannot imagine Dr. Bensal in any other mood at the time.

"What is Mr. White, with his kaleidoscopic psychology?" I was asked. My answer is: He is the Mayor, at the head of a reform administration; and it is due to this very capacity of rapidly changing his moods that he is at all enabled to maintain himself amid the surrounding wreckage.

To the question: "What are Beacon and Bensal really going to do at last?" I can only answer: We shall see.

J. ROSETT.

Baltimore, 1912.

THE MIDDLE CLASS

ACT I.

A modern physician's office with only a slight streak of the quack about it. The latter feature finds expression in the somewhat overdone display of the appurtenances and paraphernalia of the specialist: a large electro-static machine in the background; a glass instrument case containing a number of instruments; several glass tables on which are a variety of instruments, lamps, tubes and beaker glasses, filled with liquids of various colors, neatly covered over with white saucers. On one of the glass tables, near a window, is a microscope. In one corner is an examining table, in the other a wash-stand with a number of towels. Near the wash-stand is a sterilizer and a thermostat. In front is a desk, on one side of which is a revolving chair and on the other a large arm-chair. There is a telephone on the desk. In convenient places about the room are several revolving bookcases, full of books; the latter show unmistakable signs of handling. There are pictures on the walls, whose subjects appertain to the profession—expensive black prints, which testify to the good taste and capacious pockets of the doctor.

The room has two doors, on opposite sides. One

opens into the doctor's private apartments, the other into the patients' reception room.

The opening scene finds Dr. George Beacon at the wash-stand, polishing vigorously an instrument with a towel. A patient is leaving by the reception-room door.

Dr. Beacon is a young fellow near forty. He is dressed in surgeon's white. He neither appears nor behaves in the least in a manner becoming a physician who has been practicing successfully a specialty for ten years.

THE PATIENT. Good-night, Doctor.

DR. BEACON. Good-night, sir; good-night.

Dr. Beacon accompanies the patient as far as the door, closes it behind him, then walks to the opposite door, opens it, and, holding the instrument between the tips of his forefinger and thumb, claps his palms and whistles.

MRS. BEACON'S VOICE. May I come in now?

DR. BEACON. You may.

Enter Mrs. Beacon. She is a little over thirty—a girl with a rosy, strong and jovial face, and a rather slender but lithe body. For a mother of three children the amount of dignity in her bearing is far below the standard degree.

Dr. Beacon walks to the desk and sits down upon it. Mrs. Beacon gets into the revolving chair, which she tortures with a wantonness that would justify the establishment of a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Things.

DR. BEACON. You say, then, you liked it? Well, it was a merry sight. But it wasn't what I expected. They missed the point; missed it deplorably.

MRS. BEACON. Come now, George. Of course it was a merry sight. A glorious thing! What do you know about dancing anyway? Do you remember the first time you danced with me? Ha! ha! ha! It was the funniest thing in the world. Haven't I taught you whatever little you know about dancing? I—I, capital I! How dare you contradict your professor?

DR. BEACON. Seriously, it was a terrible failure. Just to think of it! What a nice, perfectly proper and respectable thing they've made of it! During those passages of deep, black despair; those passages which sound an abyss of bitterness, of hopelessness—during those passages they rested and posed before a stupid, a shallow——

MRS. BEACON. Hush now, hush!

DR. BEACON. And to the wild merriment, that hysterical, maddening storm of merriment which suddenly bursts from the abyss of bitterness—why, they danced to those notes in a nice, slow, deliberate and perfectly respectable manner. And the masses of protoplasm which filled the auditorium applauded wildly. Oh, venerable shade of Liszt!

MRS. BEACON. Don't worry about the shades, boy.

She approaches her husband, reaches out for his face with her hands and kisses him on the forehead. She then notices a little pile of paper money on the desk, which she grabs with mock eagerness.

MRS. BEACON. Oh, you pirate! I've caught you red-handed this time. (*She scrutinizes the bills.*) What a lot of money! I fear you've robbed some one.

DR. BEACON. Do not fear. My profession protects me. Had it not been for that, you might have

had good reason to fear—in this particular instance, at least; because it was a pirate I robbed.

MRS. BEACON (*with a sigh of relief*). A pirate! Well, that's not so bad then—in the eyes of the law, at least.

DR. BEACON. What? My dear, I'll not stand for that! I say I'll not stand for that! (*Walks to the instrument case and puts away the instrument.*) Such a flagrant insult against the law of our land! As a patriotic citizen I protest against it! Our law is bigger than you think, my dear. It protects the innocent man in his innocence, and the robber in his robbery. Don't speak lightly of our law!

MRS. BEACON. You have a grand conception of our law, no doubt. But tell me, dear, had you been what they call an—an ethical practitioner, would this fee be larger or smaller?

DR. BEACON. In my case it would be the same.

MRS. BEACON. Then why should you rob at all? Rather charge an ethical fee.

DR. BEACON. Because my patients would consider it robbery all the same. And this is sufficient reason for me to keep away from the ethical fraternity. If I can do no better, I shall, at least, make an honorable business of it. I say to my patients: "Here I am; you see me swaggering in my top boots, with my pistols dangling by my side. Take warning; be on your guard. Know with whom you are dealing." The result is, of course, the same—they cannot escape; only it looks a bit more honorable. But you haven't told me about the Bensals. How are they?

MRS. BEACON. Dr. Bensal wasn't in. He is seldom at home now during the day. He spends all

of his time in the University. Mrs. Bensal complained bitterly.

DR. BEACON. About his being away from home?

MRS. BEACON. No; she takes that good-naturedly enough, but——

DR. BEACON. What, then?

MRS. BEACON. They are in debt. You know, his salary is only $1,500 a year.

DR. BEACON. The proper compensation for a university professor, a mad enthusiast of science, an original investigator, a man highly esteemed by the ethical fraternity. Still, Mrs. Bensal is very economical, and they have no children.

MRS. BEACON. Yes; but his researches——

DR. BEACON. Is he still searching for the bacterium of infantile diarrhoea?

MRS. BEACON. Whatever it may be; he spends a large part of his salary in those researches. The University is poor——

DR. BEACON. Oh, I see.

MRS. BEACON. They promised to be here this evening. I expect them every minute.

DR. BEACON. I thought you said he wasn't in?

MRS. BEACON. Yes; but Mrs. Bensal called him up by the telephone, and he promised to come.

DR. BEACON. You know, he is rather shy of coming here. The ethical fraternity, you see. Poor fellow! The search for bacteria and the ethical fraternity are taking all of his time and thought and keeping him in a rut.

MRS. BEACON. Science is a rut? Do you deny the utility of searching after the truth?

DR. BEACON. Searching after the truth? There are so many truths. A pin hidden in a haystack is also a truth. To search for the pin may be fine sport but bad economy.

MRS. BEACON. For shame, George. Do you mean to deny the value of searching for the truth in the abstract? Don't you know that (*she quotes, emphasizing the words with her forefinger*) "the modern art of navigation is an unforeseen emanation from the purely speculative, and apparently merely curious inquiry, by the mathematicians of Alexandria, into the properties of three curves formed by the intersection of a plane surface with a cone?"

DR. BEACON. Yes; it cannot be denied that in certain instances people, in searching for a pin in a haystack, have found diamonds.

MRS. BEACON. But Dr .Bensal's researches are not of an abstract nature. He is doing very practical work. He is searching for the germ of a disease which decimates the children of the poor.

DR. BEACON. Poverty is a haystack that has very many pins in it, my dear; and to search for one particular pin appears to me like a "merely curious inquiry" and an injustice to the cattle——(*the telephone bell rings*). Hello! Oh, yes, of course. There will be some people here, but I do not expect any patients. You may come. I shall attend to that. Perfectly safe. In a taxi? I shall have my porter wait for you. Very well. Good by!

MRS. BEACON (*significantly*). Another sinner.

Dr. Beacon does not reply. He paces across the room twice or thrice. Mrs. Beacon follows him with

her eyes. He opens the reception-room door and calls for the porter, who enters.

PORTER. Yes, sir.

DR. BEACON. Wait outside for a gentleman in a taxi. He'd been here before. You know whom I mean. Take care that no one sees him.

PORTER. Very well, sir. (*Exit.*)

Voices from the private apartments.

MRS. BEACON. Here they are. (*She runs to the door and opens it.*) Here, here. Come straight in here.

DR. BEACON. Here, Charlie; come right in.

Enter Dr. and Mrs. Bensal. Dr. Bensal is under forty, and rather looks like a professor. Notwithstanding that he is handsome. His face and body show unmistakably that he has been guilty of the sin of neglect of his flesh. His large, dark beard and dark hair strongly accentuate the paleness of his face. And that, together with a moderate degree of emaciation, lends him a pensive shade, which disappears when he speaks. But he has the frame for a powerful body; his bones are large, and the lower part of his face speaks of a great power of will. His movements are not quick and abrupt, like those of Dr. Beacon, but are expressive of far greater certainty and determination.

Mrs. Bensal is about the same age as her husband. Her culinary art has had the effect of making her entirely too pulmp, in the estimation of people with ordinary ideas of comfort.

EVERYBODY. Good evening, good evening. (*They all shake hands.*)

MRS. BENSAL. I must tell on him (*To Dr. Bensal.*) I told you I would, and I shall.

MRS. BEACON. Tell, oh, do tell, Mrs Bensal.

MRS. BENSAL. My dear, you were present. Hasn't he promised faithfully this afternoon that he would come here?

MRS. BEACON. Of course he has.

MRS. BENSAL. I was all dressed to go, except my hat. And do you know what he said?

MRS. BEACON. What?

MRS. BENSAL. I won't repeat it; but I can tell you he was going to dodge his promise.

MRS. BEACON. He was! Dr. Bensal! Well, it's no use. This is the way with the men. You had better come with me, Mrs Bensal. I'll show you the baby, and we'll have some real nice tea. Oh, I have cakes, you ought to see (*Takes Mrs. Bensal around the waist*). Gentlemen (*bowing with mock politeness*), Dr. Bensal, Dr. Beacon, you are cordially invited to join us—on the fourth or fifth cup; rather the fifth than the fourth. We shall then be happy to entertain you at tea. (*She marches off with Mrs. Bensal into the private apartments.*)

DR. BEACON. Well, Charlie, how are you getting on with the bacteria of infantile gastro-enteritis? Have you cornered any?

DR. BENSAL. Pretty nigh. It takes time, you know. But I am in a fair way to isolate the bacterium.

DR. BEACON. And when you have isolated it, what then?

DR. BENSAL. Then, as soon as a pure culture can be obtained, the medical laboratories of the world will be set in motion in search of an antitoxin or, perhaps, a vaccine.

DR. BEACON. And when that is discovered, what then?

DR. BENSAL. Then! Then, of course, the medical practitioner will have an easy way of curing or preventing the awful malady. It will be a revolution. Just think! The artificially fed children of the poor almost all suffer, at one time or another, from the disease. The mother is kept back from work. Both, mother and child, become to a greater or less extent public charges. Think what a revolution an antitoxin will bring about!

DR. BEACON. A profound revolution indeed. The children of the poor can then be fed with impunity on any old thing, and their mothers be ground in the mills and canning houses without the tremendous trouble to which society is put today of dealing with the problem of their hand-fed children.

DR. BENSAL. You are a cynic.

DR. BEACON. How you have changed, Charles! And to think that you had had a scientific mind only a few years ago. I remember in Berlin—let me see, was it in Berlin or in Paris? In Berlin, to be sure—you remember? You dared question the Nebular Hypothesis. You asked questions then. Your view of things was broad. How one will change! There was a man for whom at twenty-five the world wasn't large enough; see him at not quite forty—he lives within the tube of a microscope, and his field of vision is one-sixteenth of an inch!

DR. BENSAL. Indeed! How a man will change! There was a man who, at thirty, had scruples about handing a visiting card with M. D. appended to his

name. See him at not quite forty—he advertises a specialty in widely circulated newspapers!

DR. BEACON. Charlie, everybody advertises—I mean every physician who makes a living by his practice. I advertise in the most direct and open manner; your ethicals do so under cover, cunningly, cringingly. How many of the articles in our medical periodicals are pure advertisement! The young practitioner who unsophistically reads that stuff for only the hundredth time, and consequently has not yet been nauseated by it, is left with the impression that Dr. So-and-So, member of So-and-So Association, visiting physician to Such-and-Such hospital, etc., etc., must be a great man. Upon this great man the young chap will shift the responsibility for his patients. To him will he send the pitiable creatures who demand of the physician that he either take their money or their lives. To be sure, the great man is not above their money, and is far above their lives.

DR. BENSAL. Nonsense. Of course, the older man has had the greater experience.

DR. BEACON. Greater experience in dealing with the psychology of his patients, and, what is more to the point, that of the patients' relatives and friends. Charlie, how can I believe that you do not know these things? I believe you are simply in a rut from which you are unwilling to prod yourself out. Your business is to teach young men medicine, and to keep them meanwhile under the impression that all they have to do in order to practice it successfully—to relieve suffering and to ward off death—is to become well versed in its art and science.

DR. BENSAL. What else can we do? We try

our best to teach them medicine. As to the practitioner's success in his business, that he must achieve for himself.

DR. BEACON. Beautiful! But have you ever viewed the wonderful results of your efforts? After having labored over a young man for some years, you at last come to the conclusion that he is sufficiently trained in the art and science of medicine to repay society for the immense amount of trouble it had taken with his education. Consequently, you kick him out of a fine morning into the world, with instructions to wait till he is wanted. He must not advertise his business. He must be good. He *is* good, anyway. To his immense surprise he finds that the world into which he had been kicked is not at all peopled with men and women, as he had expected and been taught. He finds it peopled with a problematic race, which might be martians, for all he knows of them. He finds that he is not wanted. The older practitioners confront him with a polite hostility, which freezes the poor chap's heart. They know well that the young fellow knows medicine, while they have forgotten every vestige of it; and they feel it in their bones that he will not be long in catching on to their own ways. Poor youngsters; they have stomachs, and frequently girls. Under the steady pressure of these factors the young man's ideals begin to fade. He learns that success in the practice of medicine depends not at all upon the effective treatment of the sick, but upon the skillful maneuvering of their relatives and friends. After a long and bitter experience, he at last learns the subtle art of ethical advertisement; he becomes calloused in its humiliating practice; he abandons your

medicine and multiplies his patients. Those are the fruits of your labors.

DR. BENSAL. This is not our fault. It is true, the ultimate results are not as satisfactory, perhaps, as they might have been. But this is due to the peculiar structure of our society.

DR. BEACON. Aha! You acknowledge that the bucket has no bottom. And yet, for all that, you insist upon pouring water into it. And this is what you call doing your best. (*Enter the porter.*) What is it?

PORTER. The gentleman——

DR. BEACON. I have a patient here, Charlie. Won't you go to the women for a few minutes? I'll join you directly.

DR. BENSAL. Certainly.

Dr. Bensal leaves for the private apartments. Dr. Beacon accompanies him to the door, bolts it, and then turns to the porter.

DR. BEACON. Let him in. (*Exit porter.*)

Enter the Mayor. He is a solid looking man, a little above middle age, with a full, florid face and a hearty disposition.

DR. BEACON. Good evening, Mayor. Let me congratulate you. (*They shake hands.*)

THE MAYOR. For God's sake, don't mention that word here. (*Looks about him cautiously.*) Thank you, good evening.

DR. BEACON. That's all right. There isn't anyone here. Won't you take your coat off and sit down?

The Mayor takes off his coat and swings it across the back of the arm-chair, in which he composes himself. Dr. Beacon takes his seat in the revolving chair.

DR. BEACON. What is the good news? How have you been?

THE MAYOR. Fine; only a little here; can you see it? (*Points with his finger to his forehead, close under the hair.*)

DR. BEACON (*examining the spot carefully*). This little splotch of dull copper. It does not trouble you in any way?

THE MAYOR. No; except, of course, that it does not look well.

DR. BEACON. Any trouble about the mouth?

THE MAYOR. No; everything is all right except this.

DR. BEACON. A small matter; it can hardly be seen. I don't expect it to spread. Well, there isn't much else to do but to continue along the same line. I am going to give you a slightly higher dose. (*Takes a little bottle from the drawer in the desk.*) Little pills, about the same as the others. One, three times a day, after meals. How is Mrs. White?

Mayor White waves the question away with an impatient movement of his hand, heaves a sigh, and beats a tattoo on the desk. A few seconds of uncomfortable silence. Suddenly he assumes a different attitude.)

THE MAYOR. She's all right, thank you. Don't you know, I have been wondering—does she suspect——

DR. BEACON. You are trying to pump me. However, there is no reason at all why I shan't tell you. She knows everything, and I can assure you she takes the matter with a great deal of resignation.

THE MAYOR. She does? Ha! ha! ha! But you are an unsophisticated fellow, Dr. Beacon. To

think that my wife—ha! ha! ha! takes her fate with resignation! Ha! ha! ha!

DR. BEACON. What are you laughing about?

THE MAYOR. She takes it with resignation! Ha! ha! ha! Dr. Beacon, wives do not take such things with resignation.

DR. BEACON. Your wife does.

THE MAYOR. She lies.

DR. BEACON. You mean to imply that she pretends so only before me, while at home she nags half the life out of you? Well, in that case, it is your part to take it with resignation. Remember, she is the innocent sufferer of your indiscretions; it is——

THE MAYOR. Hold on. Not so fast, Dr. Beacon. Here, don't you see, the fun of this business is that *she does not* nag the life out of me. On the contrary, she accepts her misfortune with an *immense* amount of resignation, as you call it, as behooves a devoted wife and a patient martyr.

DR. BEACON. Where, then, is the fun?

THE MAYOR. Huge fun. To see her labor under the impression that I am deceived by her sham attitude; to see her cast at me those long, innocent glances, which speak: "I do not reproach you; I leave you to your conscience." Oh, the hypocrite!

DR. BEACON. What do you mean?

THE MAYOR. Ah, you know very well what I mean. Of course, it is your business to keep your patients' secrets sacred. Still, you ought not to pretend ignorance before a friend. You know very well that she takes the matter with resignation not in spite of what she pretends to be the truth, but because of what she knows *is* the truth.

DR. BEACON. What do you mean? Come, now, don't beat about the bush! What do you mean?

THE MAYOR. Dr. Beacon, you are a friend of mine. You have done me favors which I can never fully repay. I only hope that the opportunity will one day present itself when I am in a position to repay you at least in part. I feel that it would be unfair to deceive you any longer about the truth of this unfortunate business. Three years ago we had been almost strangers, and the truth of this matter could not possibly affect the treatment. And to a stranger the truth was too ugly to be told. Consequently, I chose to take the blame and to parade my wife as the victim. Ah, now you are beginning to understand her attitude of resignation!

DR. BEACON. I see. You are the innocent man, the victim of your wife's——

THE MAYOR. Now you have it. Now you understand who takes it with resignation.

DR. BEACON. But why do you? Out of a sheer spirit of Christian forbearance and forgiveness?

THE MAYOR. That mainly. Of course, my position in society. By the way, Beacon, your wife knows nothing?

DR. BEACON. You may be at ease on that score.

THE MAYOR (*looks intently at the doctor*). What's the matter?

DR. BEACON. Oh, nothing. Ho! ho! ho! Ha! ha! ha! But it's so funny, so very funny! Don't worry, Mr. White. The Mayor's reputation is perfectly safe. Even if by any possible chance the secret of this affair should leak out——

THE MAYOR (*much agitated*). What? Is it possible for such a thing to happen?

DR. BEACON. No! no! no! Compose yourself. Not unless I become a raving maniac, and that I don't anticipate in your lifetime. But even if I should become raving mad, and take it into my head to ruin myself by disclosing my patients' secrets, it could not possibly hurt you. The people will not blame their good Mayor for the sins of his wife.

THE MAYOR. Now you are talking sense. Ah, my friend, we all must exercise forbearance toward the weaknesses, the errors, and frequently even the vices, of our neighbors.

DR. BEACON. Come away, Mr. White! Stop that! Stop that, I tell you! What sort of a game are you trying to work off on me? Ha! ha! How funny you are! Oh, you old hypocrite!

THE MAYOR. Dr. Beacon——

DR. BEACON. Stop! stop! stop! I say stop that! Enough! You better tell me about the election. Wasn't it interesting, though? According to the newspapers, you had the easiest time of it. It was——

THE MAYOR. A walk. The merest walk. Anybody tells you I ran for the office, don't believe him.

DR. BEACON. Remarkable!

THE MAYOR. There is nothing at all remarkable about it, if you take into consideration that I have spent half a lifetime in the effort to advance the various philanthropic, moral and religious movements in this city. The spirit which actuates the various societies engaged in these noble pursuits has asserted, I am happy to say, its ascendancy over the powers of corruption.

DR. BEACON. By electing you as chief executive of the city?

THE MAYOR. Precisely. It was, in fact, the conviction that as chief executive I should be in a position to accomplish much more in that direction than I have been able to as mere alderman, that at all induced me to undertake the onerous duties of the mayoralty. Of course, there was the general consideration of the people's welfare.

DR. BEACON. Still, how does that explain your election?

THE MAYOR. The simplest thing in the world. You take, for instance, the Society for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor; or the Society for the Suppression of Immorality Among the Lower Classes, of which I have been president for years; or you take the Association for the Prevention of Infant Mortality, of which Dr. Anderson is the leading spirit; or the Amalgamated Charities; or the Association for the Cultivation of the Religious Sense; or the others, too numerous to recount; they comprise thousands upon thousands of the most intelligent, the most active and sincere men and women of our large city. Doesn't that explain it easily? I am proud to say that it was thanks to the influence of the best elements, the intellectual, benevolent, moral and religious circles, that your friend stands before you as the chief executive of our large city. (*Shakes Dr. Beacon's hand.*)

DR. BEACON. Have you made all your appointments?

THE MAYOR. Not quite.

DR. BEACON. Has the Health Commissioner been appointed?

THE MAYOR. No; not yet.

DR. BEACON. I wish to speak to you about this appointment, Mr. White.

THE MAYOR (*a good deal troubled*). Some other time. I'll see you shortly. I am a little in a hurry just now. Let me get away. (*Rises and gets hold of his coat.*)

DR. BEACON. It will take but a few minutes. Mr. White, we have been friends, and you have repeatedly expressed a desire to be in a position to render me some service. You are in such a position at present. Mr. White——

THE MAYOR. Pardon me for interrupting you, Dr. Beacon. You seem to know very little about these city positions. The general impression is that they are sinecures. They are not; not in this city anyway. And particularly is this true with regard to the position of Health Commissioner. He is taken up from twelve to fifteen hours every day, week days as well as Sundays. His responsibilities are tremendous. And his compensation for all that labor and responsibility is a paltry $5,000—and not a penny of perquisites. If I were a physician, and had any practice at all, I should consider any proposition to accept such a position as preposterous.

DR. BEACON. But you do not know my motives. Of course, I shouldn't expect you to measure everybody by quite your own standard of civic virtue. Still, you must not be conceited to the extent of imagining that no civic virtue, no true honesty and public

spirit remain in the city ever since you have taken to the City Hall.

THE MAYOR. Oh, you speak, then, from a sense of public spirit. I should have known that, of course. Pardon me for having entertained any thoughts outside of that. But, as your friend, I consider myself in duty bound to tell you this: The City Council will never approve such an appointment. There is not the slightest chance. It will only cause you a great deal of unpleasantness. I want you to distinctly understand that, as far as I am concerned, I should only be too happy. But the City Council—it is entirely under the influence of the benevolent and moral circles of this city; and those will not leave a stone unturned to oppose you.

DR. BEACON (*who has been viewing him with a sly curiosity all this while*). What are you talking about? Are you out of your senses?

THE MAYOR. Why?

DR. BEACON Let me not harrow your soul any longer. I am not asking that appointment for myself.

THE MAYOR (*with a sigh of relief*). Oh, pardon me.

DR. BEACON. I understand that the office of Health Commissioner is a very important office. I have a man for you——

THE MAYOR (*with impatience*). Ah!

DR. BEACON. A man of the highest ability. You certainly must have heard about Professor Bensal.

THE MAYOR. Bensal—Bensal—let me see; I think——

DR. BEACON. Charles Bensal. Of course, if I

recollect distinctly I met you some years ago in his house.

THE MAYOR (*a little confused*). Perfectly possible; perfectly possible.

DR. BEACON. I thought so. You have met him, then?

THE MAYOR. No, I haven't. I do not quite remember what business it was which took me to his house. Let me see, what was it about? I think it was simply for political purposes—just a visit, you know. Oh, I recollect—of course—it was to engage Mrs. Bensal's services for a fair held for the benefit of the Orphans' Institute—or, let me see, was it not for the Home for Aged? Well, some such thing anyway. I remember I was very anxious to meet the professor, but I could never find him home.

DR. BEACON. But you know whom I mean, and that 's quite enough He is an old chum of mine. His fame is abroad in the land.

THE MAYOR (*in good humor*). You are not going to give me a Bible talk?

DR. BEACON. Mr. White, I am very serious. Dr. Bensal is not only a profound student, but a man of the highest executive ability. He has been pursuing microbes for some years, and I can tell you he has given them a chase. Let him have the city, and he will work wonders. He is a worker, sincere, clear-headed, persistent, and he has ideas——

THE MAYOR (*aghast*). What? Ideas? Did you say ideas?

DR. BEACON. Ideas.

THE MAYOR. And you want me to appoint that man? You, with your practical sense? To appoint

a man with—with—i-de-as! Why, do you know who elected me to office?

DR. BEACON. Who?

THE MAYOR. I'll tell you who; the middle class business men; and if they so much as suspected that the mere mention of the word ideas has not given me a fit, they would lynch me. Let me give you a piece of advice. If Dr. Bensal is your friend, never say of him again what you've just said. It would ruin the poor man. As for me, I can promise you not to repeat it to anyone. But don't ask me to appoint him to any office.

DR. BEACON. He is the most able man that you can find for that office.

THE MAYOR. There you are. An able man, too. My dear Doctor, the present incumbent has filled the office to the perfect satisfaction of all concerned. The taxpayers cannot sing him praises enough. He has no more ability than a snail. He has been doing absolutely nothing. There might as well have been no such office at all. If it had not been for the fact that he is of the other party, I shouldn't make any change for the world.

DR. BEACON. But what is the secret of his fitness for the office?

THE MAYOR. Ah! There you are touching upon the very pivotal point of our government. The Health Department, you see, is one of those departments which come to a certain extent in conflict with the interests of the taxpayers. If the head of such a department has the interests of the taxpayers at heart, he must, in a sense, obliterate himself—sacrifice himself, sacrifice is the word.

DR. BEACON. Sacrifice himself? In what sense?

THE MAYOR. In the sense of refraining from the exercise of the privileges and prerogatives of his office.

DR. BEACON. But what about his duties?

THE MAYOR. Those are his duties: they consist in refraining from the exercise of the privileges and prerogatives of his office. In thus doing his duty toward the taxpayers, he sacrifices whatever personal ambitions he may have in his capacity as chief of a department.

DR. BEACON. Dr. Bensal is the man. He is self-sacrificing—ask anyone who knows him.

THE MAYOR. Perhaps, in the field of science. But he has accomplished nothing in a field which is equally important, perhaps more important, than science. I mean public life—politics.

DR. BEACON. I agree with you there, for once. But give him a chance and you shall see.

THE MAYOR. Impossible. He has done nothing; and there are many reputable physicians who have very high political connections. If we do not stand by our friends, what will the world come to?

DR. BEACON. Connections? Why, Dr. Bensal has the highest repute among what you call the intellectual, benevolent and moral circles of the city. The Society for the Prevention of Infant Mortality have just accorded him a vote of thanks for his excellent work in that field. The Association for——

THE MAYOR. Pshaw! Those associations! What do they amount to? All of them together taken do not control a thousand votes.

DR. BEACON. And yet it is thanks to them that

my friend stands before me tonight as chief executive of our city? You have a great turn for the humorous, Mr. White. You will appoint, then, Dr. Bensal to the office?

THE MAYOR. Impossible. Doctor, you are a man with a sense of honor; let me tell you, then, that I have made promises. Does that satisfy you?

DR. BEACON. No; because you have already made more promises than you can possibly fulfill.

THE MAYOR. How do you know, then, that I shall keep my promise to you?

DR. BEACON. Leave that to me.

THE MAYOR. But I cannot; I tell you I cannot. You must understand that I have really very little to say about these appointments; that I am——

DR. BEACON. Yes, yes, I know. You are thoroughly dependent upon the "boss." He dictates the appointments, of course. And yet it is a well known fact that people in high positions, like yourself, are privileged to make one or two what is known as "personal" appointments. And such a "personal" appointment is bound to redound to your credit. It will from the very start tell the people——

THE MAYOR. The what?

DR. BEACON. The people.

THE MAYOR. The people! Ha! ha! ha You are a funny fellow, Dr. Beacon. Just hear him—the people! I remember in our school geography there was an expression to the effect that such and such a country was inhabited by such and such a people. Forget your school geography, Dr. Beacon, if you wish to learn the first rudiments of our politics. In our political geography there is no such beast I can assure

you. When we speak of the people we mean the taxpayers.

DR. BEACON. The taxpayers, then. It will show them that their new Mayor is a man with a backbone and not a door-mat for the "boss." The political heelers themselves will have more respect for you if you can show a certain degree of independence. Have you no further ambitions than to be at the head of a city administration? Why, this appointment would be a godsend in your political career. Dr. Bensal is gaining national reputation, and his name will be bound to become associated with that of your own.

THE MAYOR (*much mollified, but dejected.*) Yes, I know. (*After a few seconds of silence, with bitterness*). People are imagining that there is such an office as that of Mayor, that there is a city administration, or political parties. Fools! There are taxpayers, taxpayers, taxpayers! And their god is the mumbo-jumbo, whom they admirably surnamed in their beautiful slang the "boss." They detest him, but they fear him and sacrifice to him. He is the Moloch of our heathens, dumb and bloody. But the elements are at his command. And yet this monster is the work of their own hands.

DR. BEACON. Of course. Gods have always been the work of their worshippers' hands, and tyrants the creation of those over whom they tyrannized. Out of the God or the devil that there is in man he made his gods and his devils.

THE MAYOR. And out of the need, the greed, the grasp, the cringe and the sneak that there is in the taxpayer he made the "boss." An almighty monster! He wreaks bloody vengeance upon the heads

of those who dare to displease him; and he favors his true worshippers—with endless promises.

DR. BEACON. With nothing more substantial than promises? Is it possible?

THE MAYOR. Mainly with promises.

DR. BEACON. And his worshippers are satisfied with mere promises?

THE MAYOR. Oh, he fulfills his promises in a way. But in the end nothing more remains than the promise. The idiots! They are under the impression that he does them favors. This is the way he goes about it: He renders a favor to taxpayer A at B's expense; B finds himself robbed by A and turns to the "boss" for redress; the boss affords this redress at C's expense, and then compensates C at the expense of D. When he arrives at X he unites the ends of the alphabet, does a good turn to X at A's expense, and starts the round over again. And for every favor he does he gets a rake-off for himself. And so all parties are satisfied. The "boss" is the dynamic factor of the charmed circle of favors which keeps our politics alive and in motion. Public officials, the administration, political parties—these are only mere dots in the outline of the circle—a sort of resting stations for the "boss." And to this Moloch you now propose that I should run the risk of being sacrificed?

DR. BEACON. Look here, Mr. White. You stand in with the taxpayers, and "bosses" do not live forever. If the "boss" is killed you are sure to take his place; and the way to kill a "boss" is to defy him. You might as well begin now—you have an excellent opportunity.

THE MAYOR. Impossible.

DR. BEACON. Ah, well, keep your appointment, together with your pretended friendship. I have no political influence, consequently what good is there in rendering me a service? There is Dr. Anderson, the shining light of the medical profession, with his beautiful gray beard and numerous clientele, and his presidency over the Association for the Prevention of Infant Mortality—if he were to ask you this favor, why, the Mayor would be only too happy——

THE MAYOR. Dr. Beacon!

DR. BEACON. Oh, you are a fine lot; tigers in chameleon skins! Your god is expediency. One should beware of you as he would of fire, and trust you as much as he would the wind. Keep your favors for the Andersons!

THE MAYOR (*taking Dr. Beacon by the arm, in good humor*) Ha! ha! I didn't know you were capable of that. Come, boy, cool down!

DR. BEACON (*disengaging his arm*). Let go! (*Walks away a few steps.*)

The Mayor views the doctor as a cat would a hostile dog. He kneads his chin a few moments, then walks to the doctor, takes hold of his shoulders, and turns him abruptly about.

THE MAYOR. Here, little boy, don't sulk. You shall have your little horse and never call it a favor. Dr. Bensal is Commissioner of Health; on one condition, however.

DR. BEACON. What is it?

THE MAYOR. I want your word of honor that you will never, under any circumstances, communicate to anyone the fact that Dr. Bensal was appointed to the office through your influence. You must pardon

me for this request. As far as I am concerned, I can assure you that I have no prejudices whatever against you; but the foolish world has; and that foolish world, which will forgive any crime committed against it, will not forgive a breach of its prejudices.

DR. BEACON. You have my word. But is it quite certain that Dr. Bensal is Commissioner of Health? The fact is, he is in my house now, and I would like——

THE MAYOR. I fear it is quite certain. Haven't you told me yourself to leave the certainty of this matter to you? Confound it, Beacon, you know what you are talking about. (*Putting on his coat.*) Professor Bensal will receive by tomorrow morning's mail an official request to favor the city with his services as Health Commissioner. You may tell him, if you like, that the town is full of the news. It will be in half an hour. I shall call up the papers by 'phone on my way home. The morning editions will contain my letter to Dr. Bensal in full. (*Extending his hand to Dr. Beacon.*) Good night, Doctor.

DR. BEACON (*shaking the Mayor's hand*). Good night, Mr. White, and thank you.

THE MAYOR. No thanks, my little boy. None whatever. (*With a heroic flourish*) Dr. Bensal is Commissioner of Health, if I have to fight the whole world. (*Exit.*)

Dr. Beacon runs to the private door, opens it, and whistles and howls.

DR. BEACON. Hey, there! Phew-ew-ew-ew-ho-o-o-o! hoo-oo-oo!

MRS. BEACON'S VOICE. Hoo-oo-oo-oo!

DR. BEACON. Hey, there, folks, won't you come down?

MRS. BEACON'S VOICE. Tea-ea-ea?

DR. BEACON. I don't want any; my appetite for it is all gone.

(*Enter Dr. Bensal. He looks refreshed and stimulated by the tea.*)

DR. BENSAL. Well, George, how's business?

DR. BEACON. Pretty lively. How are things with you?

(*Enter the women.*)

DR. BENSAL. Nothing to brag about. Do you know what I came here for?

DR. BEACON. I suppose to see me? You haven't been here an age.

DR. BENSAL. Nothing of the sort. I need three hundred dollars.

MRS. BENSAL. I declare!

DR. BENSAL. So do I. I need three hundred dollars. Can you spare it for six months or so?

DR. BEACON. Of course. Anything to stand in with the Commissioner of Health.

DR. BENSAL. Commissioner of Health?

DR. BEACON. Look here, Bensal, you'll not turn Mary out of the office, will you? She's been working there quite a while now. How long has she been working there, Bess?

MRS. BEACON. What are you talking about, George?

DR. BEACON. I say, Mary has been employed quite a while now in the Health Department?

MRS. BEACON. Oh, yes; about three years. What of her?

DR. BENSAL. Who is Mary?

DR. BEACON. She is a cousin of Bess's. A girl with the most ridiculous ideas, but a first-class office hand. You'll not turn her out, will you?

DR. BENSAL AND MRS. BEACON. What in the world are you talking about?

DR. BEACON. Oh, Bensal knows very well what I am talking about.

DR. BENSAL. I don't even begin to know.

DR. BEACON. To come to the point, then. When you take your office you will probably have to make some changes in the department force. If I were you I should retain Mary, my wife's cousin. She is a first-class stenographer and typist, and an excellent all-around office hand.

MRS. BEACON. What are you talking about, George?

DR. BENSAL. Take office? What office?

DR. BEACON. Come on, Bensal; don't pretend ignorance. The office of Health Commissioner, of course.

DR. BENSAL. He is out of his senses; I cannot understand a word of what he is saying. Out with it! What in the world are you trying to do?

DR. BEACON. This is extremely singular, to be sure. But the whole town is talking about it.

DR. BENSAL. Talking about what?

DR. BEACON. About your appointment to the office of Health Commissioner, of course.

DR. BENSAL. He is out of his senses, sure enough. (*To Mrs. Beacon*) Is this one of his old pranks?

DR. BEACON. You are a better politician, Charlie,

than I took you to be. Still, I am willing to admit that it is perfectly possible that you really don't know. I suppose those matters are kept a kind of state secrets until they are ready for the explosion.

MRS. BEACON. Come, George, what is it? Have you been experimenting on yourself with some subtle intoxicant?

DR. BEACON. Nothing of the kind, my dear. But really, Charlie, haven't you heard the latest news from the City Hall?

DR. BENSAL. The City Hall? What have I to do with it?

DR. BEACON. Really, Charlie, is it possible that you don't know that Mayor White has appointed you to the office of Health Commissioner?

DR. BENSAL. You are mad.

DR. BEACON. Well, I am willing to believe that you still don't know it. If this is the case, I am happy to be the first harbinger of the glad tidings. It is said that the Mayor has made the appointment of his own initiative. I suppose the vote of thanks accorded you by the Association for the Prevention of Infant Mortality has had something to do with it. An official request to accept the position will be extended you through the newspapers as well as by mail. The position, I understand, pays $5,000 a year. Permit me to congratulate the future Health Commissioner.

DR. BENSAL. You are out of your senses, George.

MRS. BEACON. Really, George, dear, are you quite sure you are not mistaken?

DR. BEACON. I am not mistaken. It is absolutely certain. I have a number of friends among the

newspaper reporters, and you may be quite sure I took pains to ascertain the truth.

MRS. BEACON (*to Mrs. Bensal, taking her by the hand*) My dear Mrs. Bensal, it is a fact. (*To Dr. Bensal*). Allow me to congratulate you, Dr. Bensal.

DR. BENSAL. As far as I am concerned, it really makes not a particle of difference whether all this is true or not. I couldn't consider such a proposition anyway.

MRS. BENSAL. Dr. Bensal, what are you talking about? Five thousand!

DR. BENSAL. Yes, I know; but I couldn't give up my work——

DR. BEACON. You won't have to. The present encumbrance devotes to the duties of his office just one hour a week. If you devote two hours a day to the duty of refraining from the exercise of the privileges and prerogatives of the office, the middle class taxpayers will erect you a monument forty cubits high.

DR. BENSAL. Two hours a day?

DR. BEACON. Or less; it will all depend upon your pleasure; and with $5,000 a year you can do a heap of bacteria-hunting.

DR. BENSAL. But you are mistaken! It is an idle, a preposterously absurd rumor.

DR. BEACON. That, of course, we shall know tomorrow morning. What I am anxious about just now is whether you have made up your mind to accept the office in the event I do not turn out to be quite the ass you take me to be.

MRS. BEACON. My dear, that part of the business you may safely leave to Mrs. Bensal.

DR. BEACON. You have a brilliant mind, Bess. I

can see him Health Commissioner. Don't you know, I think we ought to celebrate the event with another round of tea. Have you any of those fine cakes left over, Bess?

MRS. BEACON (*with affected contempt*). Did you say tea? Preposterous! Beer! Imported beer, with oysters, and juicy steak, and onions and potatoes to boot. You puritan! I'll show you tea! The idea! We shall go out and have a great time, to the sounds of Apollo's lyre! Come, folks; let's dress and be gone.

DR. BEACON. Please, my dear, do not mention the lyre; it reminds me of a milk-and-honey diet.

MRS. BEACON. That man's nature is utterly devoid of poetry. To the sounds of the string orchestra, then!

DR. BEACON. This is better. Altogether, I think this is a happy idea, my child.

MRS. BEACON. Child, eh?

Dr. Beacon gets behind the table and makes sure that he is safely intrenched. He then straightens himself to his full length.

DR. BEACON (*with affected firmness*). That was the word—Child!

MRS. BEACON. I'll child you in a minute.

She makes after him with the swiftness of a cat. Dr. Beacon runs from behind the table, and around Dr. and Mrs. Bensal. He dodges her attempts to drive him into a corner by leading her around the table once or twice. Finally she grabs him by his coat from behind and throws her arms around him.

MRS. BEACON. I've got you!

DR. BEACON. Mercy! Mercy!

Dr. and Mrs. Bensal look on wistfully. Curtain.

ACT II.

A public reception room in the Health Commissioner's office. The room has two doors; one, on the right, is from the passageway, which leads from the main entrance, and separates the Health Commissioner's from the other offices of the Department; the other, on the left, opens into the Commissioner's private office and bears a plate with an inscription to that effect.

The room is well furnished. There are two or three settees, several cushioned chairs, a large desk—all of solid, heavy, and at the same time elegant build. On the desk is a typewriter, two telephones, writing materials and a number of books: city and business directories and other reference books. On the rear wall, between and under the windows, are a number of shelves, burdened with Health Reports and other books. The walls on the right and left are hung with maps, charts and diagrams. Some of the maps bear a number of pins with variously colored heads, arranged in groups or patches.

The opening scene finds Miss Mary Clemens at the desk, making notes with pencil and pad from some reference books, while entertaining Mrs. Jones.

Miss Clemens is about twenty-nine. She is simply and very neatly dressed. She has an intelligent, youthful face, and a slender, youthful figure. She is rather pretty, but by no means beautiful. Altogether, she reminds one of her cousin, Mrs. Beacon.

During the entire act Miss Clemens either plies the typewriter, makes notes, studies the maps and charts on the walls, or similarly occupies herself, even while

entertaining visitors. She displays a high degree of culture in her bearing.

Mrs. Jones is dangerously near forty. Her entire appearance bespeaks a tremendous effort, a bitter struggle of the fading young woman against the steadily advancing matron. Even the inexperienced eye can divine at a glance the story of the conflict: how youth with its wonted rashness, having fought against impossible odds, has to a great extent succeeded, by cutting short is own term of life, to inflict a good deal of damage upon victorious age. The matron is seen to have emerged from the fight victorious, it is true, but with the colors a good deal bespattered and besmeared.

MISS CLEMENS. If you complain, then what should the unfortunate women say, whose husbands do not so much as make a decent living for them? Surely, Mr. Jones is a model man; he doesn't drink, doesn't gamble, behaves with propriety, as becomes a business man and a gentleman.

MRS. JONES (*with disgust*). Too much of a business man, my dear. It's always business, business and business; and nothing but business. Today it's rent for the warehouse; tomorrow it's a competitor who is selling kippered herrings at cost for a leader, and the day after it's a retail grocer or two gone bankrupt.

MISS CLEMENS. Would it have been better if today it had been gambling, tomorrow drinking, and the day after something still worse?

MRS. JONES. What difference does it make as far as the wife is concerned? Only the other day I asked Mr. Jones to take me to see Hamlet. He prom-

ised. But when he came home from the office that evening he began talking wholesale groceries; the prices had been raised by the packers; the people had been out of work and eating nothing but cabbage and lard—and lard has always been a dead loss; and the wagon drivers had threatened to strike unless their wages were raised; and a collector's accounts were all wrong; and the retail men were thieves. After half an hour's talk of this sort I wished I had never asked him to take me to the theater. The man spoke as if he were on the verge of ruin.

MISS CLEMENS. I shouldn't consider it out of the way for a husband to communicate his troubles to his wife.

MRS. JONES. Yes; but when he communicates to her nothing but troubles, it becomes a bit boring. And then business is not a hundredth part as bad as he would have it appear. He simply wanted to dodge the trouble of going with me to the theater. But I am an old hand at the game. I simply let him talk on. Well, he kept up his lamentations clear up to the entrance of the theater. And do you know what he did while the play was going on?

MISS CLEMENS. What?

MRS. JONES. He slept.

MISS CLEMENS. When a man is fatigued physically and mentally——

MRS. JONES. My dear, we had the best seats in the house, and the people who are fatigued physically and mentally were all on the top gallery, and there was no one asleep there, I can tell you.

MISS CLEMENS. I can easily imagine a man who has no interest for the theater.

MRS. JONES. So can I. But Mr. Jones has no interest in anything, except credit, and collections, and smoked beef, and canned salmon and things.

MISS CLEMENS. This is business.

MRS. JONES. Just what I say: this is business. But when I married I was under the impression that I was getting a husband, and not a wholesale grocery business!

MISS CLEMENS. You are a sinner. You are well dressed; your children are well dressed——

MRS. JONES. Well dressed! Do you see this hat?

MISS CLEMENS. A very pretty hat.

MRS. JONES. It cost eighteen dollars. Now, my dear, Mr. Jones makes one-eighth of a cent on each five-cent can of sardines. Give me your pencil a minute, please (*Miss Clemens gives her the pencil and a sheet of paper from the pad*). Eight to the cent; eight hundred to the dollar, by eighteen—fourteen thousand four hundred! With all the ordinary expenses running as usual, and many extraordinary expenses besides, and at a time when people are eating nothing but cabbage and lard, Mr. Jones had to sell fourteen thousand, four hundred cans of sardines in order to furnish me with one hat. You can imagine the task I had to fish the eighteen dollars out of him! Speak of being well dressed! My dear, it is extremely fortunate for us that there is so much suffering and destitution among the poor to be relieved. If it hadn't been for that we, the women of the middle class, would be going mad for want of—of—I don't exactly know what to call it, but you know what I mean.

MISS CLEMENS. Diversion?

MRS. JONES. Not exactly. I should rather call it satisfaction—moral satisfaction. You see, my dear, the women of the rich have entertainments, and automobiles, and trips abroad, and dresses, and what not; the women of the poor have men—I mean their husbands or sweethearts; we, the wives of the middle class business men, we have——

MISS CLEMENS. What?

MRS. JONES. Oh, we have smoked beef, and beans, and flour, and bills, and credit, and cash, and sight-drafts—what satisfaction is there in these? Of course, we also have husbands—to communicate their troubles to us, to use your own expression. I wonder what has become of the committee? (*Takes out her watch. The telephone bell rings.*)

MISS CLEMENS. Hello! Yes, sir. Pardon me, Mrs. Jones. Dr. Bensal is calling me.

Miss Clemens rises, pencil and pad in hand, and leaves for the Commissioner's room, from which, a few moments later, appears Dr. Scringer. He is a handsome man of about thirty-five.

DR. SCRINGER. Mrs. Jones!

MRS. JONES (*with affected politeness*). Dr. Scringer, how do you do, sir?

DR. SCRINGER (*looks about him cautiously*). You are ironical, Dolly.

MRS. JONES. Ironical? Why, Doctor, no!

DR. SCRINGER. Don't be foolish, Dolly. You are angry, I know. But you must be reasonable. Circumstances just now are such that we must exercise the greatest caution. Have a little patience, dear. (*He touches her hand.*)

MRS. JONES (*very much mollified*). But you haven't told me what was wrong.

DR. SCRINGER. Wrong? (*With a gesture indicative of everything about*). Everything!

MRS. JONES. How is the new Commissioner?

DR. SCRINGER. Sh-sh-sh! The Commissioner? (*He snickers, and waves away the question with a gesture of his hand.*)

MRS. JONES. But you are his assistant, and an old hand in the business; why don't you guide him and instruct him?

DR. SCRINGER. My love, what nonsense you are talking! Guide him! He has gathered about him a horde of youngsters, fresh graduates in medicine, you know, and they are just tearing up things. The Police and the City Courts, and the State's Attorney's staff are kept busy with our cases. I am seriously thinking of resigning. I am ruining my political career, and I've lost my practice. He keeps me drudging here from morning till dark. For a paltry three thousand!

MRS. JONES. I shouldn't have thought Dr. Bensal could be so exacting. He is such a nice man!

DR. SCRINGER. Yes; particularly when that young lady is about. (*Indicates in the direction of the desk.*)

MRS. JONES (*with sincere indignation*). Dr. Bensal? Don't say! A married man, too! (*After a few moments of speechless awe.*) The hypocrite!

Enter two ladies.

MRS. JONES. I was just saying to Dr. Scringer, what could have kept you so late! I have been here nearly an hour.

THE FIRST LADY. An hour? Why, it's not quite two now, and we agreed to meet at two sharp.

MRS. JONES (*confused, looks at her watch*). It was my own fault, then. I was under the impression that we were to be here at one. (*Enter Miss Clemens.*) Will you announce us, dear?

MISS CLEMENS. Certainly. Won't you be seated, please?

Miss Clemens turns to go toward the Commissioner's room, when Dr. Bensal himself suddenly enters. There is a great change for the better in his appearance. The $400 *a month, drawn regularly for the space of six months, have rounded up his body considerably. He now has a fresh, clear complexion, and altogether looks healthy, and even robust—well nourished, as the doctors call it. He is well dressed, too. His voice has that tang of self-confidence in it, which emanates from a sense of well being.*

DR. BENSAL. Good afternoon, ladies. Keep your seats, please. (*He grasps a chair, and with a sudden and swift motion of his arm, brings it in front of the visitors.*) I am at your service now. (*Sits down.*)

MRS. JONES. Dr. Bensal, you have read in the papers about the proceedings of the annual meeting of the Association for the Improvement of the Conditions of the Poor?

DR. BENSAL. Yes; and I feel very much flattered.

Enter Dr. Beacon. On seeing the group engaged in conversation, he takes a step backward, as if to retreat.

DR. BEACON. Pardon me——

DR. BENSAL. Come in, come in, Dr. Beacon; have a seat there. You'll not disturb us in the least.

DR. BEACON. Thank you. (*He takes a seat near Miss Clemens, who greets him cordially, like an old acquaintance.*)

DR. BENSAL. Ladies, please, take this to your Association: I am deeply sensible of, and very grateful for, the support your Association has given this Department, in our efforts to combat long-neglected and crying evils. I am particularly grateful to those of your members who have kindly volunteered to serve as witnesses in the courts of certain intolerable unsanitary conditions.

MRS. JONES. Our purpose in coming here is double. In the first place, we wish to reiterate the Association's endorsement of the course you are pursuing in trying to free our city from the disgrace of tolerating the sale of what is practically vile refuse as food for the poor. In the second place, we wish to ask of you a favor in the way of—diplomacy, if I may so state it.

DR. BENSAL. I am not much of a diplomat. Let me hear what it is.

MRS. JONES. You must have heard about the existence of the Society for the Advocacy of Better Housing for the Poor.

DR. BENSAL. Yes, yes; of course. Only this morning several of their members have testified in some of our court cases.

MRS. JONES. Well, then, the fact is that the activities of that Society are encroaching more and more upon the field of action of the Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor.

FIRST LADY. This expresses it to perfection.

DR. BENSAL. I do not quite understand what you mean.

SECOND LADY. We mean that as long as the Society for the Advocacy of Better Housing is in the field, there remains practically nothing for us to do. And our Association is by far the older and the larger.

MRS. JONES. You will readily see, Dr. Bensal, that better housing of the poor is really the first step in the improvement of their condition generally. While the poor are badly housed, it is practically impossible to improve their condition in other ways. Bad housing is in the way. What use is there for us to teach the poor the rudiments of hygiene, dietetics, art and morality when the extreme congestion in unsanitary quarters upsets our efforts?

THE FIRST LADY. Precludes our efforts.

SECOND LADY. Absolutely.

DR. BENSAL. Well, I shouldn't think that the existence of the Society for the Advocacy of Better Housing would in any way make the housing conditions worse.

MRS. JONES. No, no; of course not. But the point is this: since improvement in the housing conditions must of necessity come first, our own Association is practically put out of business.

THE FIRST LADY. For a while at least.

SECOND LADY. For a while? God only knows how long it will be before they bring about better housing for the poor.

MRS. JONES. With their meagre means——

THE FIRST LADY. And doubtful sincerity——

THE SECOND LADY. And absolute incapacity to handle matters——

DR. BENSAL. Well—what is it you would like me to do?

MRS. JONES. The most sensible thing under these conditions would seem to be an amalgamation of the two societies; and since our Association is by far the larger and the older of the two, and the wider in its scope, it would only seem right that the General Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor shall include within its scope the improvement of housing conditions.

DR. BEACON (*to Miss Clemens*). A conspiracy, by Jove! They are conniving at the formation of a monopoly for the giving away of things to the poor.

THE FIRST LADY. Precisely.

MRS. JONES. Then we shall be in a position to concentrate our efforts in providing the poor with decent quarters; and that done, which ought not to take us very long, we can go ahead with the improvement of their condition generally. Would you use your influence to effect the amalgamation?

DR. BENSAL. The idea, in the main, is a plausible one. I think I can promise you—as soon as a favorable opportunity presents itself.

THE SECOND LADY. This is all we want. Thank you, Dr. Bensal. Good afternoon. (*Rises. The other ladies rise also. Dr. Bensal does likewise.*)

THE FIRST LADY AND MRS. JONES. Good by, Dr. Bensal.

DR. BENSAL. I was very glad, indeed, to have met you. Good by!

Exeunt the committee.

DR. BEACON. By the gods, Charlie, you are getting fat. What are you feeding on?

DR. BENSAL. It is the joy of the work, George. I wish you could feel as I do. I tell you it is a wonderful thing to command old Death: "Thus far shalt thou go, and no further," and see it obey meekly. Haven't we, in the late typhoid epidemic, given the old hag a jolly chase, Miss Clemens? (*Touches Miss Clemens's hand.*)

MISS CLEMENS (*electrified*). We have, George, indeed. Come here; look at this diagram. (*She rises swiftly and approaches a diagram on the wall.*) See this line——

DR. BEACON. Please, don't. Stop her Bensal. Mary, as you are a Christian, have mercy. Don't swoop down upon a visitor in that manner. Remember, I am largely responsible to the Commissioner of Health for your good conduct. How has she turned out, Bensal?

DR. BENSAL (*confused*). Oh, splendidly.

MISS CLEMENS. Gentlemen, I object to being made the subject of your conversation in my presence.

DR. BEACON. Among the numerous things I have failed to accomplish, the one in which I have failed most has been to teach that young woman manners. Why, Mary, you have no deference to authority! You forget that you are an inferior employe and in the presence of your chief.

DR. BENSAL. An inferior employe? Between ourselves, George, she has been the real Commissioner of Health here. She understands more about this business than anyone I know. And she does more work than anyone else in the Department.

DR. BEACON. And you are not ashamed to take four hundred dollars a month for yourself and give her only thirty-two?

DR. BENSAL. I am.

DR. BEACON (*to Miss Clemens*). And you, with your wonderful talent for detecting and protesting against the most ultramicroscopic flaws in the chivalry of man, rest in mute acquiescence when you are so flagrantly robbed?

MISS CLEMENS (*in good humor*). Oh, but this is the custom.

DR. BEACON. Ye mocking demons! Hear what she says: This is the custom. That answers everything. What about the bacteria now, Bensal; have you forsaken them altogether?

DR. BENSAL. No, no; we are after them in hot pursuit.

DR. BEACON. Still searching for them?

DR. BENSAL. No; I have said we were pursuing them.

DR. BEACON. What are you doing?

DR. BENSAL. Draining lots, pulling down uninhabitable disease-holes, teaching people how to keep clean, compelling greedy landlords to furnish their tenants not only with rent collectors, but also with good water, light and air. Then, too, we administer the vaccines and antitoxins. We keep a strict supervision over all the food stuffs sold. We quarantine and fumigate. And we have a project under way which, if successfully completed, will save the children of the poor from the ravages of summer diarrhoea.

DR. BEACON. Then you have discovered the microbe of infantile gastro-enteritis at last?

DR. BENSAL. No; but I have discovered the cause of the microbe.

DR. BEACON. And what's that?

DR. BENSAL. Well, I really haven't discovered it. I should rather have said I have learned to forget the microbe for its cause; but the cause itself is well known.

DR. BEACON. I suppose improper feeding——

DR. BENSAL. Of course. Isn't it strange that so little should have been done to remedy this factor?

DR. BEACON. How are you going to remedy it?

DR. BENSAL. The simplest thing in the world. By instituting municipal milk dispensaries.

DR. BEACON. But there are such institutions—maintained by the charities, I think. Almost every newspaper has a milk fund.

DR. BENSAL. Yes; but private charity is necessarily limited in its scope not by the need of the needy but by the munificence of the munificent. It is different with a municipal institution. And then such an institution would only be a beginning of a much wider project.

DR. BEACON. What else?

DR. BENSAL. This Department has the question of disease to solve—not of any particular disease, but of all disease. Now, of course, nearly all diseases are caused by micro-organisms; but the existence of micro-organisms is due to a lowered resistance—we know that—and the lowered resistance is due to poverty and its concomitants, ignorance and indifference.

DR. BEACON. How will you remedy poverty?

DR. BENSAL. That I do not know as yet. But I do know, I think, how to prevent the diseases caused by the lowered vital resistance brought about by poverty, that is, by the lack of proper food, clothing, shelter and knowledge.

DR. BEACON. How?

DR. BENSAL. Very simply. We vaccinate for the prevention of smallpox; we can feed and clothe for the prevention of the other diseases.

DR. BEACON. We? Who?

DR. BENSAL. Now, of course, all this is a distant project. You ask me who? The municipality.

DR. BEACON. But even so, can you tell me who is going to shoulder the expense of such institutions? Even that of your immediate project of a municipal milk dispensary?

DR. BENSAL. Who shoulders the expense of our hospitals, our free dispensaries, our foundling asylums, our homes for the aged?

DR. BEACON. Philanthropy, I suppose.

DR. BENSAL. Well, then, where is the difficulty? The same philanthropic persons who now contribute their money in the form of charity would then contribute it in the form of taxes. Indeed, they won't have to contribute as much. It is much cheaper to prevent than to cure.

DR. BEACON (*mephistophelically*). Ha! ha! ha! The philanthropic spirit of the taxpayers!

DR. BENSAL. You may laugh—it is because you don't know. You have never thought of it. Let me give you a superficial idea. Do you know—now listen—do you know that the entire middle class—mind you—the entire middle class is actually organized into one grand philanthropic army? Ah, this is a phase of our history with which you are not acquainted. Let me inform you, then, that I have not met a single man or woman of the middle class who is not either an

active member of, or a contributor to, some philanthropic institution. Do not laugh at the philanthropic spirit of the middle class. It is the grandest phenomenon of our civilization.

DR. BEACON. Yes; but taxes and philanthropy are very different things. One gets something in return for philanthropy, but what does the taxpayer get in return for his taxes?

DR. BENSAL. What does one get in return for philanthropy?

DR. BEACON. Well, in the first place, a sense of moral satisfaction.

DR. BENSAL. Is not the same moral satisfaction deriveable from doing one's duty toward his fellow citizens by paying his or her share of the taxes?

DR. BEACON. Ha! ha! ha! Have you ever heard of the sense of moral satisfaction which the taxpayer derives from paying his taxes? Why, Bensal, I know a number of taxpayers who would rather contribute hundreds of dollars in the form of philanthropy, if they could only save the paying of thousands of dollars in taxes.

DR. BENSAL. I am not speaking of the unscrupulous individuals. I am fully aware of the existence of such; and this Department is having its own troubles with them. I am speaking of the middlemen as a class.

DR. BEACON. May you rest in peace with your faith in the philanthropic spirit of the taxpayer unshaken. Is your faith, too, in the philanthropic toy of the middle class, Mary?

MISS CLEMENS. You are becoming admirably exact in your expressions, George. I am very glad to

learn it. Yes; my faith is in the philanthropic toy.

DR. BEACON. Hear what you are saying, Mary. Faith in a toy?

MISS CLEMENS. Yes, in a toy. The cynic looks upon the girl who plays with her dolls, or upon the boy who delights in the toy-engine, as upon little improvidents, who waste their parents' good money in mere childish play. But the thinker sees in this play the incipient striving of the future woman for motherhood, and of the future man for industrial progress. Do not look with contempt upon the women and men who delight in the philanthropic game——

DR. BEACON. A very expensive game.

MISS CLEMENS. All games are expensive if you see in them nothing but games, and no game is too expensive when you can see in it the preparation for the serious business of life. The philanthropic game of the present is the beginning of a new chapter in the history of mankind. Those who can see in the girl's play with her dolls the flower of future motherhood, can also see in the spirit of philanthropy the blossom of a future higher grade of co-operation among mankind in their business of life.

DR. BENSAL (*enthused, presses Miss Clemens's hand*). Thank you. Do you understand, George?

DR. BEACON (*views the ecstatic group a few moments; he notices the somewhat embarrassed but happy expression of the girl's face, and Dr. Bensal's enthusiasm, to which he gives spontaneous vent by pressing the girl's hand*). Oh, yes; I think—I understand. But to return to your immediate project of municipal milk dispensaries for the children of the poor. Do you know what you propose to do? You propose to deprive the

benevolently disposed persons of the gratification which they at present derive from this form of charity. A monopoly, just think!

DR. BENSAL (*in good humor*). I do not propose a monopoly on charity. There is no reason why the city should refuse the good money or the good work of anyone who may wish to offer it for the benefit of the municipality.

DR. BEACON. Well, that makes it a little easier for the deserving rich. But then there is the danger of pauperizing the poor.

DR. BENSAL. We do not pauperize them by vaccinating them at the city's expense. The city does this simply to prevent smallpox. The city will furnish suitable milk to those who may be in need of it, in order to prevent the summer diarrhoea of children.

Enter a young doctor.

THE YOUNG DOCTOR. Pardon me.

DR. BENSAL. Hello! What's the good news?

The young doctor hands him a paper, which the Health Commissioner reads with much attention, smiling broadly when he has finished.

DR. BENSAL. Good. The very thing. (*To Dr. Beacon*) This is to prove to you that I am not ignorant of the existence of selfish and sordid spirits even among the middle class taxpayers. Here is an entire square block of houses, seventy-four in all, without any provision for drainage whatever, maintained in direct violation of the law.

DR. BEACON. Without any drainage?

DR. BENSAL. None whatever. I have inspected the condition myself. Imagine a mud-pool, surrounded by seventy-four wretched shacks, all crowded

with tenants to their utmost capacity. The centre of the square is seven feet lower than the sides. The agency which has the property in charge refuses to either raise the ground or to construct a deep sewer.

DR. BEACON. What do you propose to do?

DR. BENSAL. We'll teach those people that neither fear nor favor can deter this Department from enforcing the law. The case is now in the City Court. I expect the trial to come off shortly. (*To the young doctor*) Have you the witnesses, Doctor?

THE YOUNG DOCTOR. I have called at the office of the Society for the Advocacy of Better Housing for the Poor. The lady in charge promised to send down several of their members immediately to investigate the conditions.

DR. BEACON. But why don't you get the tenants to testify?

DR. BENSAL. Our case would then surely be lost. The tenants of that class live in fear of the landlords. If they offer complaint to this Department, or testify afterwards at court, the landlord compels them to vacate the premises. What good can it do them then, under such circumstances, to incur the trouble and the loss of time of complaining or testifying against the landlord? They might as well move from the premises to start with. On the other hand, it is of advantage to have as witnesses altogether disinterested parties. (*To the young doctor*) Very well, then, go ahead . (*Exit the young doctor.*)

DR. BEACON. Have many of that sort of cases been decided against the Health Department?

DR. BENSAL. A few. But we haven't had the experience in handling them.

Enter Mr. Adams, the secretary of the Amalgamated Charities, a man of about fifty. He is carefully dressed, according to the latest styles. He carries a stout cane with a silver handle—a present which he received for his excellent service at the last meeting of the directors of the Amalgamated Charities. He affects good manners. He is excellently well nourished and indeed, appears to be a very healthy man. The so-called spiritual parts of his constitution are pretty much walled in by firm layers of muscular and adipose tissues; and those that do protrude are seen to be wrought in hickory and strengthened with iron bands.

DR. BENSAL. Mr. Adams, so glad to see you. (*They shake hands.*) Mr. Adams, Dr. Beacon.

MR. ADAMS. Good afternoon, Dr. Bensal. Glad to meet you, Dr. Beacon. Can you spare me a few minutes, Dr. Bensal?

DR. BENSAL. Certainly, certainly. (*He puts his arm familiarly around Mr. Adams' shoulder, and in this wise walks him into his private office.*)

DR. BEACON. Mary, you haven't been to see us for months. Bessie is coming here to upbraid you. What do you do evenings?

MISS CLEMENS (*pensively*). Oh, nothing, nothing in particular; read a little, perhaps.

DR. BEACON. Do you go much to theater?

MISS CLEMENS. No; they haven't had anything interesting this season.

DR. BEACON. Do you see people? I mean, have you any associates, friends?

MISS CLEMENS. A few—very few—rarely; only casual acquaintances.

DR. BEACON. That has been the trouble with

you, Mary. Why don't you learn how to make friends? Haven't you any friends among the officials here? You have been in this Department for over three years now.

MISS CLEMENS (*with contempt*). Officials? No.

DR. BEACON. Too bad. Have you no craving for—association?

MISS CLEMENS. George, who gave you the right to take upon yourself the office of my father confessor?

DR. BEACON (*taken aback by this sudden sally*). Pardon me. I didn't mean to—Three o'clock, and Bessie isn't here. I've been waiting an hour now.

MISS CLEMENS. You are waiting for Bessie, then? Where is she?

DR. BEACON. Looking over the latest items on the subject of Government by Commissions, at Brookley's book shop. We went shopping, and I helped her with her ribbons and things.

MISS CLEMENS. What do you know about ribbons?

DR. BEACON. A great deal. Bessie relies entirely on me in matching colors and in calculating lengths.

MISS CLEMENS. But she sends you off out of her way when buying books. And you really believe that she needs your help in selecting ribbons?

DR. BEACON. Of course she does. She asks for it.

MISS CLEMENS. Why not? It costs her absolutely nothing to afford you the opportunity of imagining yourself in the part of her instructor and guide—

in selecting ribbons, at least—a part which is no doubt yours by Divine right.

DR. BEACON. What? You accuse me of entertaining the fossil idea that man is woman's instructor and guide by Divine dispensation?

MISS CLEMENS. Don't despair. The fact that you are anxious to deny it is proof that the notion is retrogressive in you. You will be rid of it entirely in a generation or so. We are progressing at a tremendous rate.

Enter Mrs. Beacon.

DR. BEACON. Bessie, is it true that you are trying to flatter my vanity by giving me the opportunity to appear in what she terms as the part of your instructor and guide?

MRS. BEACON. Don't listen to her. You know she has always been a jealous and mischievous girl. Leave him alone, Mary. Don't worry the poor boy with abstracts. (*To Dr. Beacon.*) I haven't been long in coming, have I?

DR. BEACON. Speaking in terms of all time, no.

MRS. BEACON. What are you staring at?

DR. BEACON. My dear, this hat becomes you wonderfully well. Let me see again. Don't you know, I am arriving at the conclusion that after all you are quite pretty.

MRS. BEACON. You liar! Schmeichler! You have been telling that to me for the last ten years! I have never believed a word of it.

DR. BEACON. That's a pretty bad state of affairs, isn't it, Mary? I fear, after all, you are right; she is a hypocrite; she only pretends that I have an influence with her. The bitter fact remains that in ten long

years I have not succeeded in making her believe a thing so obviously unbelievable.

MISS CLEMENS. How dare you imply that I have called Bessie a hypocrite?

MRS. BEACON. You wretch! Just wait till we get home!

Enter Mr. Jones. He is a little below the medium stature and somewhat beyond middle age. His hair and moustache are steel-gray. The wrinkles on his face are just beginning to deepen into boundaries for future integumental flaps. His pointed nose and sharp eyes give him the appearance of being continually on the lookout. The latter trait is very much accentuated by a habit of slightly but appreciably turning his head to one side or the other, in the direction of the least sound, as if apprehensive of lurking danger, or on guard for concealed prey. In dress and in manner he is a picture of respectability. His polite carriage and habitual smile are the results of the long contemplation of a placard over his office desk, with the following inscription: "A smile is an asset; a frown a liability." He makes a visible effort to produce the impression of massiveness, of solidity, as if he were a bank building. In this he fails deplorably; the fact is, he weighs only 135 *pounds —*50 *pounds less than his wife!*

MR. JONES. Good afternoon, ladies. Dr. Beacon, how do you do, sir?

THE LADIES. How do you do, Mr. Jones?

DR. BEACON. Good afternoon. How's business?

MR. JONES. So-so, sir. Pretty much as usual, sir.

DR. BEACON. Groceries and provisions selling pretty lively, I suppose?

MR. JONES. It all depends upon the time and season, sir. (*With an air of importance.*) The retailers are complaining. A trifling investment, you know. They must not expect to make fortunes. How's the chief's health, Miss Clemens?

MISS CLEMENS. He is very well, thank you. Won't you be seated?

MR. JONES. Thank you. (*He moves a chair to the front, near Dr. Beacon's. Mrs. Beacon engages in quiet conversation with Miss Clemens, while the latter is at work, picking out information from reference books, or sticking pins into the maps. The place becomes rather busy with officials going in and out, leaving papers with or taking word from Miss Clemens.*)

MR. JONES (*to Dr. Beacon*). And how is the Doctor? Quite well?

DR. BEACON. Quite well, thank you.

MR. JONES (*moving his chair close to Dr. Beacon's*). Waiting for the Commissioner?

DR. BEACON. Yes—not particularly.

MR. JONES. I understand you are quite on intimate terms with him?

DR. BEACON. Well—in a way——

MR. JONES. M-m-m. (*Confidentially.*) Do you know anyone who has influence with the chief?

DR. BEACON. I understand his wife——

MR. JONES. No, no; I don't mean that. I mean whether you know of anyone who is on terms of confidence with him—from a business standpoint? Some one who would introduce me to him.

DR. BEACON. Oh, this is the simplest thing in the world. Miss Clemens will introduce you.

MR. JONES. No; that will never do. I need some one—some one—couldn't you introduce me?

DR. BEACON. I suppose I could.

MR. JONES. Thank you. I thought you were the man. I am in need of your services, Doctor.

DR. BEACON. I should be happy to render them to you, Mr. Jones.

MR. JONES. It is understood, I shan't expect your services gratis.

DR. BEACON. I shouldn't think you would.

MR. JONES. I am glad to have found you here. I have always maintained that of all the profession in the city, you were the man with a real sense of business.

DR. BEACON. Thank you; this is very complimentary.

MR. JONES. This has been my rule in business: Pay your way. Working along this rule, I don't expect your services for nothing.

DR. BEACON. Like a business man, you know that it would be a mere waste of the energy involved in the act of expectation.

MR. JONES. Precisely. Our services should always be paid for.

DR. BEACON. Always; and sometimes even others' services as well.

MR. JONES. Sometimes? I can tell you, I have always had to pay my way. I expect to do so to the end of my days.

DR. BEACON. Ah, yes; I fear we shall never live to see the business man's paradise. But wouldn't you rather come to my office?

MR. JONES. It might be too late?

DR. BEACON. Nonsense! You are nervous about it. This is always the case. Don't fear, my good fellow; a couple of hours won't kill you.

MR. JONES. A couple of hours! I might be too late. Irreparable damage might be done. It must be attended to at once.

DR. BEACON (*viewing him curiously.*) But how can I? This is a public office. Are you out of your senses? What would you do if you hadn't found me here?

MR. JONES. Ah, well. There's always some one to be found about these offices who has the confidence of the chief of the department.

DR. BEACON. Oh, I see! What is your trouble?

MR. JONES. You see—there have been on the market several varieties of canned and preserved goods, such as sardines, salmon, meats, the various vegetables and fruits——

DR. BEACON. M-m-m——

MR. JONES. Of the cheaper grades, you know. You understand, of course, that there are on the market different qualities of food stuffs the same as there are different qualities of shoes, clothing, and so on.

DR. BEACON. Of course; of course.

MR. JONES. Now, I really cannot see why this Department should raise such a racket about that matter. I suppose the chief's head has been a little turned by those confounded societies. You have read in the papers about the proceedings of the annual general meeting of the Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor?

DR. BEACON. I have heard something about it in a casual way.

MR. JONES. Well, then, you understand the situation. Can I rely upon you to straighten matters out for me?

DR. BEACON. Straighten matters out for you?

MR. JONES. As I have said, I shan't expect your services gratis.

DR. BEACON. Mr. Jones, let me not draw you into surprises. Since I am not a professional politician, and do not otherwise cherish any ambitions of making myself snug with the public, I am not going to display any indignation at your attempt to bribe me. But let me give you a piece of advice—it is well meant: Don't attempt that sort of thing in this office. Certain people whom I know here are just waiting for such a chance to make political capital of. Go straight to Dr. Bensal and state your case. He is not at all an unreasonable man. This much I can tell you: he thinks the world of the middle class business men. So don't be afraid to let him know who you are.

MR. JONES. Thank you, Dr. Beacon. I hope you understand my situation. I am simply at bay.

DR. BEACON. Yes; I understand your situation. But you are not alone. All of you middlemen are in the same boat. This ought to be some consolation to you.

MR. JONES. A small consolation.

DR. BEACON. The only consolation.

MR. JONES. What is the world coming to?

DR. BEACON. There is no telling. It might come to where it would have to rotate about its axis without the incentive of the cheaper varieties of groceries and provisions.

Enter Dr. Anderson. He is a very beautiful man of

sixty-odd. His long, white hair and beard add to the reverence of his aspect and accentuate the softness of his expression. His calm, kindly mein bespeaks a great benevolence of disposition and purity of soul. A fresh, pink skin, which is almost transparent, declares of a life well spent in the preservation of the flesh. And, finally, an immaculate dress heralds aloud the fact that Dr. Anderson is by no means the only person to take care of Dr. Anderson.

His appearance brings a hush about the reception room. Mr. Jones, Mrs. Beacon and Miss Clemens instinctively rise from their seats. Dr. Anderson casts a contemptuous glance at Dr. Beacon and approaches Miss Clemens.

DR. ANDERSON. Is Dr. Bensal in?

MISS CLEMENS. Yes, Doctor. Will you kindly be seated?

She moves for him a chair. Curtain.

ACT III.

The Health Commissioner's private office. A well furnished, large room. In the front is a large, flat-top desk, on which are two telephones, neatly arranged piles of paper—probably official reports—and a number of samples of different makes of vaccine virus and diphtheria antitoxins. In the rear wall are two windows. On a little table, against the light of one of the windows, are a number of tall glass tubes, filled with liquids of different degrees of transparency—probably samples of water from the several city reservoirs. In one corner is a large bookcase; in the other a model fumigating apparatus. The walls are hung with maps, charts and diagrams, similar to those in the reception

room. There are several heavy chairs. The room has but one door, to the right.

Enter Dr. Bensal and Mr. Adams.

DR. BENSAL. Dr. Beacon and I were just speaking about the philanthropic activities of the middle class. The importance of that movement as a factor in the making of modern history is but little appreciated, probably because we ourselves constitute a part of that movement.

MR. ADAMS. Quite correct. The edifice of charity must be viewed from a distance, where it can be seen in its entirety, to be fully understood and appreciated.

DR. BENSAL (*beckoning Mr. Adams to a seat and taking one himself*). Will you be seated?

MR. ADAMS. Thank you. (*Composes himself in a chair, opposite Dr. Bensal.*) It takes years of assiduous and unbiased study of the philanthropic cause to gain an adequate idea of the extent of personal sacrifice that it involves. Particularly is this true with respect to the property owner, the man who bears the burden of the taxes. And when it is considered that the sums sacrificed on the altar of charity are derived from the residue of the property owners' earnings—after the taxes, water rents, and so on have been paid—then, perhaps, it will be found that we, too, the charity workers, whose duty it is to gather in the charity funds, feel the weight of the taxes to no less an extent than the taxpayers themselves.

DR. BENSAL. To the credit of the taxpayers I must say that, within my experience at least, I have never heard them complain about the burden of the taxes which they bear.

MR. ADAMS. Of course not. The taxpayer is too much of a business man to complain. What good would it do him? And then, too, he always has what we might call a reserve fund, upon which to draw whenever taxes or similar expenditures become high.

DR. BENSAL. A reserve fund?

MR. ADAMS. Yes; a reserve fund. This reserve fund consists of the sum which he devotes to philanthropy. When taxes or other expenditures increase, the charity funds sink with the certainty of fate, and the thousands of the destitute fall victims to want, crime and disease.

DR. BENSAL. Well, admitting that the charity funds do sink whenever the taxes become high, it still remains a question why the people should suffer in consequence, since the taxes themselves are, in the long run, for the benefit of the people.

MR. ADAMS. The people? True. The answer is very simple. The benefits which emanate from increased taxes are enjoyed by all the people, rich or poor—and when we get down to the bottom truth of it, it will, perhaps, be found that the rich benefit even to a greater extent than the poor. But the benefits of charity are enjoyed by the poor man only. We must stand by the poor man, Dr. Bensal.

DR. BENSAL. But what would you say about a tax for the exclusive benefit of the poor?

MR. ADAMS. You are referring, of course, to your project for the establishment of municipal milk dispensaries. You will find me in favor of that project, heart and soul.

DR. BENSAL. Thank you.

MR. ADAMS. You can count on the hearty sup-

port and co-operation of every worker in the Amalgamated Charities. But we must proceed with great caution.

DR. BENSAL. What do you mean?

MR. ADAMS. We must bear in mind the fact that, after all is said and done, the taxpayers are those who render the final verdict on any project concerning the municipality. If their sentiment is by any means turned against your project, we might as well give up all hope. A great degree of diplomacy must, therefore, be exercised, and every possible effort made to avoid any friction with the taxpayers, at least until the project is successfully launched.

DR. BENSAL. This is just what we are doing. We are making every possible effort to avoid friction with the taxpayers. But in certain instances it is absolutely unavoidable.

MR. ADAMS. Perhaps—perhaps; I am quite sure. Still, this is a large city, and between ourselves, sanitary conditions have been deplorably neglected by your predecessors; and since, moreover, the activity of the Health Department is limited by its force of employes, it would seem that you have a very wide field of action—an abundant choice of material, so to say. It is in the choice of material that a great amount of judgment must, at this time, be exercised.

DR. BENSAL. In the choice of material, you say?

MR. ADAMS. Or, as you would term it in your medical lore, in the selection of the cases. Generally speaking, it is perhaps a good plan to make an example of a certain number of negligent property owners, in order to teach the rest a wholesome lesson. But, and I say this in all candor and with a feeling that the ulti-

mate interests of the Health Department and of the Amalgamated Charities are exactly identical, we must, I say, exercise great care in the selection of our cases.

DR. BENSAL. I thank you for your candor. You must permit me, however, to correct an error in your argument. You are referring, of course, to the prosecutions which we have instituted against certain unscrupulous and refractory landlords. We have done this not at all with the idea of making an example of them, but because it is part of the routine work of this Department. We do our very best to coax a negligent landlord into making the necessary improvements, and it is only when all other means have failed that we invoke the interference of the law.

MR. ADAMS. And even so. Since, as we have agreed, the choice of cases is abundant, it would stand to reason that one case is as good as another. If this be true, then why shouldn't the choice be made in a manner to serve the ultimate interests of the Department best? I take the liberty of saying this only because of my firm conviction that the interests of the Health Department and of the Amalgamated Charities are closely bound up together.

DR. BENSAL. Are you referring to any special cases?

MR. ADAMS. Yes. But before proceeding I wish to make quite sure whether you agree with me that the ultimate aims of the Department under your charge, and those of the Charities, are the same, namely, the relief of human suffering, the prevention of untimely death.

DR. BENSAL. This is my sincere conviction. I have maintained it all along.

MR. ADAMS. Now, since you understand my motive, I am at liberty to speak. I refer to a certain property in charge of the real estate agency of Lucas and Lucas.

DR. BENSAL. A square block of houses, seventy-four in all. The chief complaint of this Department has been defective drainage. The agents have been duly notified, and, I can assure you, we have given them every opportunity to abate the nuisance. They simply will not abate it.

MR. ADAMS. They have done wrong, I admit. And yet there are extenuating circumstances which must be considered. Similar nuisances have been a matter of course in our city. They are the baneful results of the former administrations. Under the present reform administration, for the inauguration of which we have all been working so hard, improvement in conditions is bound to come. But as far as the owner of real property is concerned, you will readily see that improvements on his property are necessarily and naturally limited by the prevailing rates of rent. When the owner of real property is compelled to make certain improvements, he must raise the rates of the rent. But a single property owner cannot possibly raise the rates without all the other property owners doing it at the same time. Otherwise his tenants will vacate his premises, with the consequent impossibility to make the improvements.

DR. BENSAL. But then there is no way out of this vicious circle.

MR. ADAMS. There is no way except to make a breach in the circle—to sacrifice the interests of a certain number of property owners.

DR. BENSAL. Sacrifice!

MR. ADAMS. Yes; sacrifice. I, at least, am not afraid to use the word. It is inevitable. A certain number of property owners must be sacrificed to the public weal. But the public weal must not suffer by the sacrifice, or the end is defeated. And I tell you, Dr. Bensal, that the end is certain to be defeated, and the public weal to suffer, by the present choice.

DR. BENSAL. Why so?

MR. ADAMS. Because Lucas and Lucas have been among the heaviest and readiest contributors to those health funds, which we designate by the name of charity. Now, you must understand that the source of Lucas and Lucas's earnings is the commissions which they make on the rents for taking charge of people's houses. The improvements which you require of them would necessitate a considerable raising of the rent rates. The latter is, under the present circumstances, impossible. The tenants would simply vacate the dwellings, there would be neither rents nor commissions, with a corresponding slump in the treasury of the destitute, the sick, the helpless.

DR. BENSAL. The property, in its present state, is a menace to the public health. I have inspected the conditions myself. The entire space is nothing but a polluted mud-pool of the worst kind. The plastering and the mortar of the houses have become thoroughly saturated with moisture, with the result that the plastering has to a great extent dropped off. We have telling figures to prove the extent of the danger. (*Picks out a paper from a pile.*) Here. Seventy-four houses in all. One side of the square—twenty houses— is known as the Lung Block, because there is not a house

in it where there has not occurred a death from consumption in the last five years. Among the one hundred and thirty-eight families who inhabit the property—a total population of six hundred and thirty-seven people—there have come within the notice of this Department, only within the last four months, thirty-odd cases of typhoid fever. Mr. Adams, these conditions are sufficiently appalling to call for immediate and determined action on the part of the city administration.

MR. ADAMS. But will you not admit that poor food, unemployment and care may have been very powerful factors in reducing the vitality of those people to the point where they fall easy victims to disease?

DR. BENSAL. To be sure.

MR. ADAMS. And for the relief of starvation, unemployment and sickness you propose the raising of the rent-rates and the destruction of the charity funds?

DR. BENSAL. I—I—do not propose that.

MR. ADAMS. But you do. Without commissions on rents I canont see where Lucas and Lucas are going to get the money to contribute toward the Charities.

DR. BENSAL. But the value of the property is bound to rise with the improvements, with a consequent rise in the rate of the rents, which will in turn mean more income from commissions for Lucas and Lucas.

MR. ADAMS. I cannot see the consistency of that. For the relief of the evils brought about by the poverty of the poor you propose to make them still poorer by charging them bigger rents. And all that in order to dig a sewer or two Why, do you know what you

are doing? You are simply taking the funds devoted to the relief of human hunger, of nakedness, of destitution and throwing them into ditches! If this is your idea of things, then what remains for me to say?

DR. BENSAL. But, Mr. Adams, how else could this Department proceed with the work of public sanitation?

MR. ADAMS. To be sure, there is no other way. As I have candidly admitted, I am fully aware of the necessity of sacrificing the interests of a certain number of property owners. But if the poor are to be deprived of a portion of their due, it would only seem an act of mercy to deprive them of a lesser rather than of a greater portion. Why then select Lucas and Lucas? I am sure there is no dearth of badly neglected premises in our city.

DR. BENSAL (*reflectively*). Are you quite sure that the charity funds would suffer to any great extent if Lucas and Lucas were compelled to abate the nuisance on their premises?

MR. ADAMS. Of course. It is the simplest thing in the world to understand. I tell you the firm has no other source of income than the commissions on the rent of the tenants. And from your own investigations you can see plainly that the tenants are poverty-stricken and that it would be a matter of impossibility to charge them higher rents.

DR. BENSAL (*mechanically*). It is a very singular road by which your charity funds travel. From the destitute tenants to the lanlords, from the landlords to the Amalgamated Charities, and thence to the tenants again, perhaps to help them pay the arrears on their rent. (*Suddenly, with force.*) Mr. Adams, by

what sort of wonderful magic are the charity funds kept circling everlastingly in that manner? Is there no wear and tear involved in the process? If there is, then how can the motion proceed with undiminished velocity? Surely, there must be some wear and tear. There is stationery, offices, officers, expert charity workers, and they must all live——

MR. ADAMS. Oh, now, now, now! What good is there in that sort of talk? Of course they must all live. Everybody must live. And you, too, must live. You order drainage to be instituted. What is the result? The tenants must pay bigger rents. And what is the result of that? The taxable basis is increased, and the property owner carries part of his increased income to the City Hall in the form of taxes, from which you finally draw your salary. And this is how you live. Doesn't then your living, too, according to your own logic, come from the rent paid by the tenants? Well, then, the charity worker makes his or her living in exactly the same manner that you do. Where is the difference? That isn't anything that we can help. It is in the nature of things. Everybody must live. (*He watches Dr. Bensal in a manner that an expert lion-tamer would a dangerous specimen of the beast.*)

DR. BENSAL (*mechanically*). Yes; everybody must live.

MR. ADAMS. And the poor, too, have a right to live, Dr. Bensal. I am sure you understand the situation. It is extremely serious. The demands upon our treasury have been greater than ever. The hard times have sent additional thousands down hill. You wouldn't have the heart to deprive the destitute, the sick, the dy-

ing of the succor of charity by diverting the charity funds into other channels?

DR. BENSAL (*with a sudden burst if impatience*). Are you insane, Mr. Adams? What sort of a fool are you trying to make of me? Where, in the name of common sense, is the succor of your charity for the inhabitants of the Lung Block? This is a brilliant idea, indeed! To leave the poor in wretched pest-holes in order that you may be enabled to dole them out charity! Mr. Adams, how dare you, sir, to come to me and ask me to sanction the maintenance of a public nuisance in order that your treasury may not possibly suffer to the extent of a few hundred dollars?

MR. ADAMS (*crestfallen*). Dr. Bensal—please—compose yourself. Pardon me—but the matter is far more momentous than you think. My anxiety is not about the few hundred dollars which Lucas and Lucas are going to withdraw, but about the Amalgamated Charities. The entire Amalgamated Charities are at stake!

DR. BENSAL. How so?

MR. ADAMS. Ah, you don't know what power of scent the property owners possess. They will smell the rat immediately. Your course means the ruin of the Amalgamated Charities, I can assure you.

DR. BENSAL (*with suppressed indignation, ready for a spring*). Are you quite sure, now?

MR. ADAMS. As sure as my name is Adams. The property owners will have nothing to do with the Charities.

DR. BENSAL. Then the sooner they smell the rat the better. This is the condition, then, which the philanthropic gentlemen exact for the maintenance of the

Charities? To keep a wretched humanity in pest-holes built upon a swamp, in dirt and in ignorance, until they have become infected with a hundred diseases of the body and mind—until they are one loathsome, disease-breathing and disease-breeding mass, beyond cure and beyond redemption? Mr. Adams, you cannot exact that condition from me!

MR. ADAMS (*suddenly grasps Dr. Bensal's hand in supplication*). Dr. Bensal, I have a wife and five children to support, and I am no longer a young man. Stop the prosecution of Lucas and Lucas as a personal favor to me.

DR. BENSAL. Why? What has that to do with you?

MR. ADAMS. I shall lose my position. If I haven't enough influence with the city officials to protect the interests of our contributors, I shall lose my position. Lucas and Lucas are on the board of directors, and they have very extensive connections besides. They will not keep me a month.

DR. BENSAL (*sincerely*). Poor man! I wish I could help you. I am sorry I cannot. However, don't worry over it. (*With sarcasm.*) It is quite unlikely that they will discharge you. In my estimation you are too valuable a man for the patrons of the Charities. As a last resort, you have my permission to put the entire blame on me. Indeed, you may do that in the first place. I shall bear the blame cheerfully.

MR. ADAMS. You are sarcastic, I see. I thought I could speak to you, reason with you. It's no use. But let me tell you this: Instituting a prosecution is one thing, but the verdict of the court is frequently quite another thing. You will have to hunt up wit-

nesses from among your own employes, or from among the tenants. None from the Society for the Advocacy of Better Housing, nor from the Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor, nor from any other society in any way connected with the Amalgamated Charities.

DR. BENSAL. Why not?

MR. ADAMS (*rising to go*). Why not? You are awfully generous, Dr. Bensal. Why not! Because they are the wives and daughters of the property owners. God bless you, Dr. Bensal; good by!

Exit Mr. Adams. Dr. Bensal paces the room in silence. Miss Clemens looks in at the door, and a few moments later Mr. Jones enters, hesitating.

DR. BENSAL. Do you wish to see me?

MR. JONES (*with great deference*). Dr. Bensal? My name is Mr. Jones. You have met Mrs. Jones.

DR. BENSAL (*approaches Mr. Jones and shakes hands with him.*) Yes, indeed, I am glad to see you, Mr. Jones. Be seated, please. (*They take seats.*) What can I do for you, Mr. Jones?

MR. JONES (*with much hesitation*). It is rather a delicate matter. I am here on behalf of a number of retail grocers. It was Dr. Beacon who advised me to speak to you. He thinks the world of you.

DR. BENSAL. Thank you. You say you are on behalf of certain retail grocers?

MR. JONES (*clearing his throat*). Precisely. And yet I don't want to produce the impression that I am here an altogether disinterested party. To a certain extent my own interests are involved. But it is mainly in behalf of the retail grocers that I come here.

DR. BENSAL. What has happened to the retail grocers?

MR. JONES. Dr. Bensal, has it ever occurred to you that the retail grocer is the hardest-worked, worst paid drudge in our society?

DR. BENSAL. I can imagine he is having a pretty hard lot.

MR. JONES. I can assure you. His work begins at five in the morning, and he never rests until ten or eleven at night. Fifteen and sixteen hours a day, day in day out, of the worst kind of drudgery! Himself, his wife and his children are all actually spending their lives in the business—all for a bare living. The prices on goods have been high and the laborers' wages low. So there you are; between the Provision Trust and the low wages of labor, the retail grocer is made the victim. (*He stops abruptly and waits for the words to sink into Dr. Bensal's mind.*)

DR. BENSAL. To be sure, this is a very unfortunate condition of affairs.

MR. JONES. People are apt to think that the retail grocer is a man who is, so to say, in business for himself. It is the greatest fallacy imaginable. His possessions are, in the great majority of instances, either zero or less than zero. He is everlastingly on the verge of bankruptcy. The least breath of an evil wind will send him toppling down the hill. Dr. Bensal, we are all prostrated at the feet of the Provisions Trust.

DR. BENSAL. I believe you are right.

MR. JONES. It is needless to tell you that the fashionable grocer keeps the best, the most expensive articles of food in his stock, while the little grocer on

the corner of Necessity Alley, whose customers are the poor people, keeps none but the cheapest. Because no matter how poor a man is, he must eat; and he cannot eat what he cannot afford to buy.

DR. BENSAL (*with apprehension creeping over him*). Of course; of course.

MR. JONES. You will readily understand that in the grocery line, like in every other line of business, there are grades of goods of different qualities, from the most expensive to the cheapest.

DR. BENSAL. Certainly.

MR. JONES. If you only knew the life and the tribulations of the little grocer as well as I do, your heart would go out to him as mine does.

DR. BENSAL. I am sure I am ready to do for them everything within my power. Is there anything in connection with this Department that I can do for them?

MR. JONES. Give them a chance. Don't force them into bankruptcy.

DR. BENSAL. Force them into bankruptcy? What do you mean?

MR. JONES. If you should interdict the sale of costly articles of food, you would ruin the fancy grocer —isn't it so?

DR. BENSAL. Undoubtedly; but I have no such intention.

MR. JONES. But exactly the same must happen to the poor grocer when you interdict the sale of the cheaper grades of wares. He must get out of business.

DR. BENSAL. I don't quite understand what you mean.

MR. JONES. There have been on the market, for

I don't know how long, certain grades of canned, preserved and smoked goods—meats, the vegetables and the fruits—of the cheaper varieties——

DR. BENSAL. Oh, oh; I see.

MR. JONES. I understand you are contemplating the seizure of those wares. If you should do that you will ruin the retail grocers.

DR. BENSAL. Is there much of that stuff on the market just at present?

MR. JONES. That is impossible to say. It all depends upon how much of the last job lot has already been sold by the retail grocers.

DR. BENSAL. Have you no way of approximating the amount? How large was the last lot, and when was it placed on the retail market?

MR. JONES. It amounted, if I remember correctly, to something like $20,000, and I began putting it out about three months ago.

DR. BENSAL. Is $20,000 very much to you, Mr. Jones?

MR. JONES. A great deal, indeed. But there is probably not more than $500 worth of that lot left in my warehouse at present. Those job lots are disposed of quickly.

DR. BENSAL. But the retail grocers owe you the amount? I understand.

MR. JONES. Oh, no, no! As I have already told you, my interest in this matter is the least. These grades of goods—odd lots, you know—are sold cheaply in order that they may be sold quickly, and the rule is cash on delivery.

DR. BENSAL. And you say the grocers have had

those goods for about three months? They cannot have very much left by this time.

MR. JONES. Of course not. Perhaps not one-tenth of the original quantity.

DR. BENSAL. Ah, well. The loss to the share of each retailer will then be very small. It will not ruin them.

MR. JONES. I tell you, Dr. Bensal, it will. It will put those goods under a ban in the eyes of the public!

DR. BENSAL. Of course, it might hurt your business a little. And yet—an occasional job lot—what does it amount to in a big wholesale business like yours? You don't really depend upon that for your living. I am sure the retailers do not.

MR. JONES. But they do! What else is there in the grocery line to depend upon for a living? Sugar? Lard? Gasoline? The Sugar Trust, and the Beef Trust, and the Oil Trust haven't enough for themselves, let alone giving a chance to the poor merchant. What articles, then, can we depend on for a profit? First-class fancy goods? Who eats those? The well-to-do. And how many well-to-do are there? Nine-tenths of the retail grocers would starve to death if they depended upon the well-to-do customers for a living.

DR. BENSAL. Be reasonable, Mr. Jones. You wouldn't expect me, in the capacity of Health Commissioner, to permit the sale of rotten food stuffs?

MR. JONES (*with irritation*). Rotten food stuffs—vile refuse—these are the names which they apply to the poor man's wares. And after that they expect him to make a living. Vile refuse! Why, don't you know, Dr. Bensal, that to the lady in the $50,000 opera outfit,

the calico dress of the poor factory girl is a vile attire? What wonder, then, that the same lady, who is surfeited with dainties, should call a five-cent can of sardines vile refuse, and rotten food stuff, and what not? Digestion depends a good deal upon the appetite—you ought to know that. The idle lady, fed on dainty food, has neither appetite nor digestion. But the hard workingman's stomach craves for food; and cheap food is better than no food at all.

DR. BENSAL. I am sure this Department has no objection to the cheapness of food.

MR. JONES. Oh, is that it? You wouldn't mind seeing the poor man eat even the best of food? Is that a joke? Dr. Bensal, how can the poor man obtain costly food when his wages do not suffice? Is it your advice, in that case, that he go without any food at all? Or would you like us to give him goods of a higher quality than he can pay for?

DR. BENSAL (*in a spirit of perversity*). Ah, well, what use is there in talking? You cannot expect to go on poisoning people with impunity.

MR. JONES (*desperate*). What? Poisoning people? That is a very nice way of expressing it, no doubt. But it is not a scholarly way of viewing the situation, Dr. Bensal. Indeed, it is a very superficial way. Very. Must the poor man have food or must he not? The question seems simple enough. And will you tell me, in the name of common sense, what sort of food you expect a family of eight, with a total income, in the best of times, of $9.00 a week, to feed upon? There is sickness, and there is unemployment. We poison him? Pardon me, Doctor, but that is an error. If he is poisoned, it is not by us, but by some

one else. We always give him his money's worth, and the proof of it is that we haven't become rich by the poor man. I haven't saved a penny since I have been in the business, nor have any of the retailers. And I can tell you we haven't been idling. Why, the poor man is ground in the mill, and factory, and mine; he is cheated and robbed in every turn of his life, from the plug of tobacco for his pipe, to the cradle for his babe, and the funeral for his worn-out wife. He is made to pay the taxes in the form of high rents; and there are ten thousand other devices for getting the few pennies out of his pay envelope; and then, after he has nothing left there, you come to the grocer and tell him, in a spirit of humanity, that the poor man must have wholesome food. That is a huge joke, Dr. Bensal!

DR. BENSAL (*paces up and down the room for a few seconds, evidently much disturbed*). You are perhaps right. (*Deliberately.*) There is much truth in what you've just said. Very much truth. (*Helpless and at bay, he becomes artificial and perverse.*) But you will have to cut out the sale of rotten food stuffs, all the same! You may as well make up your mind. (*He paces up and down the room, making an effort to appear as if he tried to repress anger. In this he finally fails. He tries to make his utterances appear impetuous, but they sound calm and foolish.*) As a business man, a man in good standing in the community, you ought to be ashamed, Mr. Jones, to try to justify an unjustifiable act. (*He tries to appear as if working himself up in a rage, but his inner calmness sickens him.*) You have been selling poison for food—do you understand that? (*He is now absolutely sickened by his imbecility, and his last utterances sound*

hollow and cold). Do you understand? And you haven't grown any poorer by it! And I am not so sure about that hard work of yours——(*He is exhausted*).

MR. JONES. What do you know about that? Have you ever conducted a wholesale business on a small scale? What do you know about the Tartarus, through which the middleman must wade neck-deep to keep himself from bankruptcy? A single wrong step, and he sinks never to rise again. Do you think your department is the only force against which we have to contend? I can assure you the Health Department is only a straw on our backs—the straw which breaks the camel's back. There is the Provision Trust, which presses upon us and grinds us like a millstone the size of a mountain. And there is the nether millstone, too, hard as steel—Can you guess what the nether millstone is?

DR. BENSAL (*with artificial impatience.*) No!

MR. JONES. Then I'll tell you: Low wages.

DR. BENSAL (*aghast, he suddenly becomes natural*). Ah!

MR. JONES. Aha! You are beginning to understand? But you don't know it all—no—not a thousandth part—not if I kept on talking to you all day. You must live it in order to understand it. You must be a middle class business man to know his trials and tribulations. I tell you we haven't blood enough in our veins to quench the thirst of the Provision Trust from above, which grinds us against the rock of low wages below. And when our blood is drawn we must smile. Do you understand that? We must smile! smile—though we are in agony! And there isn't a leech in

creation that does not turn into a boa-constrictor the moment it tastes our blood; from the policeman on the beat, and the food inspector, and the charity worker, and the fashionable dressmaker, and milliner, and the ocean-resort hotel proprietor, and the political heeler to the trust magnate. I tell you we are encompassed by greater dangers in this civilized community than if we had lived in the depths of the African jungles!

DR. BENSAL (*with an effort at sarcasm*). And for all that you still manage to live?

MR. JONES. Yes; so long as we have the alternative of surrendering either our money or our lives; until a reform administration turns up, which will be satisfied with nothing short of our lives. After all, we have no one but ourselves to blame. We wanted a reform administration; we have got it.

DR. BENSAL. Was it any better under the old administration?

MR. JONES (*with impatience*). I don't know. It's a pretty hard choice to make between a thousand rats and one tiger. You are resolved, then, to drive us to bankruptcy?

DR. BENSAL. God forbid! But while this Department is in my charge I am quite resolved to put an end to the sale of poisonous food-stuffs in this city. (*He approaches Mr. Jones and takes his hand.*) Mr. Jones, you have taught me something for which I am grateful. I hope we shall remain friends.

MR. JONES (*sees a ray of hope*). I am happy to hear this. What is it, if I may ask?

DR. BENSAL (*still holding his hand*). That you are a member of a class which must become extinct in the very near future. There is no place for you in our

society. You are lost—utterly, irretrievably; you are beyond hope and beyond redemption. In the history of mankind—

MR. JONES (*tearing away his hand from the grasp of Dr. Bensal*). I thank you, Doctor. This is very polite of you! But I haven't come here to be insulted! Good by, sir.

Exit Mr. Jones. Dr. Bensal remains standing in the centre of the room with drooped head. He is deeply absorbed in thought. After a few seconds he covers his face with his hands, as if trying to arrange and concentrate his thoughts. While he is in this attitude, he does not notice the entrance of Miss Clemens. The girl divines something unusual in Dr. Bensal's appearance, something which she evidently admires. She is reluctant to disturb him; or, perhaps, she is reluctant to interrupt herself in her pleasure of admiring him.

MISS CLEMENS (*in a low voice*). Dr. Bensal.

Dr. Bensal removes his hands from his face, and stares at her blankly. Finally, with a sense of realization:

DR. BENSAL. Miss Clemens! (*His thoughts are now rapidly arranging themselves in order.*) Miss Clemens—the man—who left here just a moment ago

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MISS CLEMENS. Mr. Jones?

DR. BENSAL. A hungry wolf! A beast of the forest at bay! Understand—he must live—he must live! Yet how can he? The forests have been cleared all around—civilization everywhere! What can the wolf do? It is the working of the fatal law of evolution—the blind, the inevitable, the pitiless law of evolution! A terrible thing! A species is becoming extinct under

our very eyes—an awful sight! What makes it still more awful is the fact that the wolves are endowed with an acute human intelligence—they see their inevitable doom, they feel the agony of their hopeless situation! Oh, it is a pity! No, no! They are wolves at bay! They cannot be trusted, they must not be relied upon!

MISS CLEMENS. The human wolf has a great saving quality, Dr. Bensal. He can accommodate himself to conditions with a wonderful facility, and become a serviceable dog. He will perish as a wolf only to reappear as a dog.

DR. BENSAL (*pensively and sadly*). It seems as if human society were an open book to you. Ah, we university professors are slow thinkers! (*He approaches her and reaches out for her hand, but she moves away with a slow side-movement. He does not perceive that the movement on her part is deliberate, and follows her slowly*). But our work—upon whom can we now depend for support in our work? (*He again reaches out for her hand, and she again evades it*).

MISS CLEMENS. Dr. Anderson is here.

DR. BENSAL. Dr. Anderson? Really! He comes like an angel-saviour in the right moment. (*He rushes toward the door and opens it.*) Dr. Anderson—Dr. Anderson! Come here!

Enter Dr. Anderson.

DR. ANDERSON. How do you do, Bensal, how do you do?

DR. BENSAL (*freely expresses his joy by shaking Dr. Anderson's hand*). Dr. Anderson, how are you?

Miss Clemens hesitates a few seconds and leaves the room.

DR. ANDERSON. Now, tell me, Bensal—you seem to be in excellent spirits—are you still enjoying the work in this Department as well as when I saw you last?

DR. BENSAL. Yes; and even more so as I go along. Of course, the duties of the office are at times —what shall I call it?—onerous?—no, I will rather say perplexing. But all in all it is very wholesome work. It is live work, Dr. Anderson.

DR. ANDERSON. But I fear you are neglecting a little your studies of the causes of infant mortality?

DR. BENSAL. On the contrary, I am pursuing that study from a more relevant standpoint—rather let me say from its more immediately practical side. I shall have very valuable material for your use in your president's annual address to the Society for the Study and Prevention of Infant Mortality.

DR. ANDERSON. Thank you. What is the nature of the material?

DR. BENSAL. It is a study of the relation of the earning capacity of parents to infant mortality and morbidity. I have taken up that study in connection with the work of this Department. I have two very able young men working on it. The results of the investigations are simply astonishing.

DR. ANDERSON. I see. And how is your project for municipal milk dispensaries progressing?

DR. BENSAL. Dr. Anderson, I fear—I cannot depend much upon the support of the taxpayers in this project.

DR. ANDERSON. What? Why?

DR. BENSAL. I fear—it is almost certain—that they will not support it. The fact is they do not care—they do not give a scrap what is going to happen to the child—or to anybody else, for that matter. They have none but their own sordid interests at heart.

DR. ANDERSON (*aghast*). Oh, come, come, don't speak in that manner about our taxpayers. Why, Bensal, without the assistance of the taxpayers we might as well give up the work to which you and I have devoted our lives. You forget that the taxpayers are the very ones who are supporting our hospitals, our asylums, our foundling institutions—everything, everything. You must not give way to a pessimistic mood.

DR. BENSAL. A pessimistic mood? I am not sure of that. I must have time to think——

DR. ANDERSON. Of course it is a pessimistic mood. I am sure you are suffering from an indigestion. Indigestible food has been the source of many a great evil. It forms the basis of all pessimism. We, medical practitioners, know that.

DR. BENSAL. Perhaps you are right. I have partaken of an indigestible dish.

DR. ANDERSON. You have sinned, Bensal. You have indulged too freely of late in the trivialities of everyday life. Get back into the fold of our goddess, Bensal. Pay less attention to trifles, and more to the enduring facts of science. Do not forget: veritas vos liberabit.

DR. BENSAL (*with levity*). High priest, I am penitent!

DR. ANDERSON. Of course, we must all live. We all have more or less of worldly business of our own. But we must not take those things too seriously.

It is not worth our while to make enemies and perhaps injure the higher aims of our lives.

DR. BENSAL. Make enemies? But how is it possible otherwise? Copernicus and Galileo made enemies, even though the subjects with which they dealt were the stars, millions of miles away. How much more are we apt to make enemies of people when they themselves are the subjects of our study and our business!

DR. ANDERSON. My dear Bensal, I have practised medicine these thirty-five years, and I am not aware of a single person ill-disposed towards me.

DR. BENSAL. But what is the secret of making friends, without at the same time making enemies?

DR. ANDERSON. The secret lies in the ability to sacrifice immediate and little things in order to accomplish more distant and greater things.

DR. BENSAL. But Copernicus and Galileo were willing to sacrifice themselves altogether.

DR. ANDERSON. Those were other times.

DR. BENSAL. Then what about Haeckel, in our times?

DR. ANDERSON. Well—there is the same unfortunate disposition of not being able to concede little matters for the sake of greater advantages to the cause of science. Take your own case. You cannot make up your mind to make trifling concessions to the taxpayers, even though you know that such a course is almost certain to ruin a project which, if successfully completed, would be a godsend to the children of the poor.

DR. BENSAL. Dr. Anderson, that is out of the question. The concessions which they demand are not little. Under the conditions which the taxpayers would like to maintain, municipal milk dispensaries would

amount to absurdly grotesque institutions, absolutely useless, entirely out of place. No, no; if we succeed in accomplishing anything at all, it will be in spite of the taxpayers. We can never depend upon their co-operation. But the law is on our side, and the profession will give us support. You, as the head of the profession——

DR. ANDERSON. Who knows for how long?

DR. BENSAL. You will accept, of course, the presidency of the Society for the Study and Prevention of Infant Mortality for the coming term?

DR. ANDERSON. I do not know; I do not know. I haven't thought of it.

DR. BENSAL. Of course you will. The Society will not part with you as long as we can help it.

DR. ANDERSON. Thank you. I have been serving the profession now 35 years. I suppose I shall have to answer the call of duty the little time that remains me.

DR. BENSAL. Little time! Oh, come, Dr. Anderson; you are a much younger man than many a young man of thirty-five.

DR. ANDERSON. Perhaps in spirit; but not in body, not in body, Bensal.

DR. BENSAL. You are as supple as a boy. Arterio-sclerosis has never touched you.

DR. ANDERSON. Yes; but looks are deceptive. My strength is failing me, Bensal. The burden of mental anguish is weighing me down. To you, as to my friend, I do not hesitate to confess it.

DR. BENSAL. I am very sorry to hear that. Has there been anything wrong with the Society?

DR. ANDERSON. No; on the contrary, the pro-

fession is more than ever alive to questions of public welfare. I am happy in the thought that the work of my life has not been in vain. But I am afflicted with personal reverses.

DR. BENSAL. Anything wrong with the children?

DR. ANDERSON. No, no; it is purely a business matter. Bensal, we doctors make poor business men.

DR. BENSAL. Have you met with business reverses?

DR. ANDERSON. Yes; and I shall never meet with them again. Because I shall not engage again in business for a mere money profit. It is not becoming a man of science. I have transgressed once, I shall not transgress again.

DR. BENSAL. I am very sorry to hear that. I hope your losses have not been very serious?

DR. ANDERSON. Very serious indeed. I am about to lose my entire worldly fortune—the savings of a lifetime. I had hoped that by a life of abstemiousness and self-denial I might be enabled to bequeath to the cause for which you and I have labored hard a little money, and thus advance the cause, so to say, by the very act of my death. But my hopes have been wrecked.

DR. BENSAL. The work which you have contributed to the cause of the infant is certain to overshadow any money bequests that you could possibly make.

DR. ANDERSON. Thank you. But money is needed for the practical part of the work. Without money we are helpless.

DR. BENSAL. True, money is needed. But what good will it do to grieve over something that is beyond

recovery? You will harm the cause by brooding over it. We need your mind, Dr. Anderson.

DR. ANDERSON. The fact is—it is not beyond recovery.

DR. BENSAL. Oh, really? Then things may yet come to a good turn?

DR. ANDERSON. Yes, if—if you will help me out of the difficulty.

DR. BENSAL. I? I should consider it a privilege to be in a position to relieve you of any possible anxiety. Tell me what I must do.

DR. ANDERSON. Bensal, I was foolish enough to engage in the real estate business. I had known no more about it than the man in the moon.

DR. BENSAL. I should think you knew mighty little about it.

DR. ANDERSON. It had been presented to me as a safe and profitable investment. I bought a number of little tenement houses, and turned them over forthwith to an agency on contract. It has turned out, however, that the houses are in bad shape. The fact is there is no provision for drainage there. Had I had an idea of the true state of affairs, be assured I would not have gone near them. Bensal, here is my word of honor that in five years—that is, ever since I have been in possession of the property—I have not been there even once. I only drew the profits. The agency attended to the collection of the rents, the payment of the taxes, and, in fact, to everything connected with the maintenance of the property.

DR. BENSAL. But where is the difficutly? Make the necessary improvements and be done with it.

DR. ANDERSON. The necessary improvements

are of such a nature that they involve not only the rebuilding of the houses, but the raising of the ground as well. You can see what it means. The very ground is missing from under the houses.

DR. BENSAL. Where is the property located?

DR. ANDERSON. I thought you knew. The property is located in the neighborhood known as the Hook.

DR. BENSAL (*with apprehension*). How many houses are there?

DR. ANDERSON. Seventy-four.

DR. BENSAL (*with an effort to repress his anxiety*). In charge of Lucas & Lucas?

DR. ANDERSON. Yes.

DR. BENSAL (*with sudden and deep emotion*). Those houses! You own them! (*With his elbows on the desk, he supports his head with his hands, partially covering his face.*)

DR. ANDERSON. I have told you how I came by them. Forty thousand dollars! The cause of the prevention of infant mortality loses forty thousand dollars!

DR. BENSAL (*with icy calmness*) . The cause of the infant will not lose—if anything it will gain by that loss of forty thousand dollars. (*He takes a paper from the desk.*) Here are the facts. Of all the children under the age of ten who have lived in those houses for the past five years, not twenty-five per cent. have survived. The greater number have died in infancy from every possible contagious disease. The place is a veritable pest.

DR. ANDERSON. You are right.

DR. BENSAL. I thank you. I knew you would admit it.

DR. ANDERSON. I must admit what I know is

the truth. Still, there is a chance of saving the money without continuing the condition for any length of time.

DR. BENSAL. I should be happy to give you every asssitance in my power.

DR. ANDERSON. Will you give me a month's grace?

DR. BENSAL. With pleasure. Two months if you please. Within two months you will begin the work on the improvements.

DR. ANDERSON. Either I or someone else. That, of course, would not make any difference?

DR. BENSAL. Of course not.

DR. ANDERSON. Bensal, I am ashamed of having ever owned that nuisance. I thank you for enabling me to get rid of it. Will you withdraw the prosecution?

DR. BENSAL. Withdraw it? Why? I can simply suspend it for the time being.

DR. ANDERSON. But under these circumstances I cannot sell the property. You understand that no one is going to buy a property involved in a law suit of this kind. (*He places his hand over Dr. Bensal's, which is on the desk.*)

DR. BENSAL (*suddenly withdrawing his hand from Dr. Anderson's, as if the latter were a hed-hot iron*). What! Is that what you mean to do? To sell the property without informing the buyer of the true condition of affairs? Dr. Anderson! You! No, no, no! Of course I shall not withdraw the prosecution! But you can have the two months' grace. I have promised you that.

DR. ANDERSON. I see you regret having granted me that?

DR. BENSAL (*busies himself with some papers*). That does not matter.

DR. ANDERSON (*after a minute's uncomfortable silence, rises*). I see you are busy. Pardon me for having troubled you, Dr. Bensal. Good afternoon.

DR. BENSAL (*without looking up*). Good afternoon.

Exit Dr. Anderson. Dr. Bensal rises, takes a few strides about the room, then approaches the desk and fumbles listlessly some articles on it. Suddenly the door opens, and Miss Clemens, followed by Dr. and Mrs. Beacon, enter the room.

DR. BENSAL (*suddenly awakened*). Mrs. Beacon! George! Oh, George! (*He gets hold of Dr. Beacon's both hands.*)

DR. BEACON. What has happened to you, Charles?

DR. BENSAL (*relinquishing Dr. Beacon's hands*). Hyenas! Hyenas all! (*He rushes to Miss Clemens and grasps her hand.*) How well you have known them, Miss Clemens! I wonder now how it was that I have not understood you when you warned me against them. What a wonderful girl you are, Miss Clemens!

MISS CLEMENS (*confused, perplexed and very happy, she withdraws gently from the doctor's hold*). Really?

DR. BENSAL. But now we shall fall to work. We shall teach the hyenas some wholesome lessons in humanity. Will you take down for me a couple of letters, Miss Clemens? (*To Dr. and Mrs. Beacon.*) Pardon me. Be seated; we shall return directly. (*Exit with Miss Clemens.*)

MRS. BEACON (*appalled*). George!

DR. BEACON (*with stoic calmness*). What it is, dear?

MRS. BEACON. What is it? Haven't you seen?

DR. BEACON. What do you mean, sweet?

MRS. BEACON. Do you pretend not to have noticed?

DR. BEACON. I have noticed quite a number of things these thirty-five odd years, my dear. Do you refer to any particular thing, or to all things in general?

MRS. BEACON. I hate you!

DR. BEACON. Don't tell me that, sweetest; better let us change the subject.

MRS. BEACON. Change the subject? What subject?

DR. BEACON. I really don't know, dear.

MRS. BEACON. George, dear, please don't.

DR. BEACON. Of course not, my girl; I shan't for the world.

MRS. BEACON. Oh, please, George, don't do that. Tell me, haven't you really noticed anything—in the behavior of—Dr. Bensal?

DR. BEACON. With regard to the hyenas?

MRS. BEACON (*angrily*). No; I mean towards Mary.

DR. BEACON. Singular number then: the hyena. Of course I have. But why didn't you say so outright?

MRS. BEACON. Don't try to dodge the subject again. What do you think of it?

DR. BEACON. Think of it? Nothing, of course.

MRS. BEACON. George, you are outrageous!

DR. BEACON. But what would you expect me to think of it?

MRS. BEACON. I don't expect you to think any-

thing. I only want your opinion. Come, now, don't try to get away from the subject in that manner. It is cowardly! Do you approve of their relations?

DR. BEACON. Let me see. I really cannot say that I am aware of any relations between them that I do not approve of.

MRS. BEACON. What! Of all the scandalous things you have ever uttered, that is certainly the most scandalous! Now listen. It concerns Mary. She is a young and inexperienced girl.

DR. BEACON. I might concede your imputation as to her inexperience, but as to her youth, really, my dear——

MRS. BEACON. I want you to be serious now. Listen. Dr. Bensal may be a very good man, to be sure, but he is only a man, after all.

DR. BEACON. My dear, how lightly you speak of a man. Hear her—only a man!

MRS. BEACON. And remember, he is a married man. Think of the scandal! Of course, Dr. Bensal will, in the end, get out of the water dry enough, he is a man. But Mary—think of it—she is a girl.

DR. BEACON. That is just what I say: think of Mary! A girl near thirty, with the soul of a woman, and with as many opportunities for the expression of her womanhood as if she had been locked up behind iron bars. My dear, why do you begrudge the poor girl a little fun?

MRS. BEACON. But her reputation!

DR. BEACON. Her reputation, indeed. Well, then, we'll save her reputation. We'll suppress forever, we'll stifle the most sacred principle of a woman's existence; we shall tread under foot the sole joy of her life; we

shall snuff out the spark which had been lit somewhere a hundred million years ago, and kept alive through untold difficulties and dangers in its wanderings through ten thousand forms—but we'll save her reputation! Indeed, my dear, what care we for nature's labors of a hundred million years, or for the glory of her immutable and eternal laws, when a reputation is——

MRS. BEACON. George, you are mad! (*They are interrupted by the entrance of Dr. Bensal and Miss Clemens.*)

DR. BENSAL. George, I shall have to modify my plans somewhat.

DR. BEACON. Indeed? What has happened?

DR. BENSAL. It is almost certain that I cannot expect any assistance in my work from the Amalgamated Charities, or from any of the societies connected with them.

DR. BEACON. Indeed? Ah, well—what do those societies amount to, after all? You have the large and powerful class of taxpayers, those who support our hospitals, our foundling asylums, our homes for the aged, our——

DR. BENSAL. No, no; they will oppose me.

DR. BEACON. Well, then, you still have what you call the heavy batteries of science on your side. The medical profession is lined up solidly behind you. With such a general as Dr. Anderson——

DR. BENSAL. No, no. We can expect no co-operation from that quarter. I am coming to the conclusion that those elements thrive on filth, on disease, on death itself! (*Suddenly, with force.*) But we have the law on our side, and we shall make use of it to purge this unfortunate city of the pestilence——

DR. BEACON. What was it you've said you had on your side?

DR. BENSAL. The law——

DR. BEACON (*boisterously and mephistophelically*). Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho! The law!

They all remain dumbfounded by his laughter, and stare at him with a kind of awe. Curtain.

ACT IV.

Scene I.

The Mayor's private office. A spacious, well-furnished room. In the front is a large flat-top desk, on which are writing materials, two telephones, and a number of books—evidently reports of the various City Departments. There are wall-bookcases, with very new-looking books in them. The windows in the rear wall are of stained glass. The room has two doors: one, to the right, which is the Mayor's private entrance, the other to the left, which communicates with the public reception room.

Mayor White is seated on the edge of the desk, engaged in a warm conversation with his messenger, Mr. McNulty.

The Mayor's messenger is a young man of about 29, lean, smooth-faced, agile and sleek. He stands before the Mayor, and gesticulates freely during the conversation.

THE MAYOR. How soon did he rally?

MESSENGER. Just like that—in a jiffy. We cert'ny got fooled, every one of us in the crowd. Well, sir, up he jumps and straight after Bunk. Bunk kinder looked at him sidewise like. He couldn't beileve his own eyes; and before he got time to know what hap-

pened, Grouchy landed him a whack in the gizzard, and down he went, like a log.

THE MAYOR (*with enthusiasm*). Gosh! McNulty, you're certainly a lucky dog. You're crying about the hundred you've lost—I'd have given three hundred if I could have been there. (*With a sigh.*) Such is life!

MESSENGER. I don't see why you couldn't.

THE MAYOR. You don't?

MESENGER. Indeed I don't. I'm sure everybody'd be only too glad.

THE MAYOR. What? You're a fool, McNulty. With all the blue faces, and long chins, and charity associations, and church people, and the respectable professions, and prominent citizens in the city? What are you talking about? Mad? Now, go on.

MESSENGER. Well, sir, I saw myself a hundred to the good. But I suppose I guessed too soon. And you ought to hear the crowd howl—gee! Well, 'twas his good luck that time was called just then. They rubbed him down, and I'll be switched if in a minute Bunky wasn't in fine shape again, all ready for the hottest yet. This time he started Grouchy on a run after him—that's his old trick, you know. And Grouchy let himself be fooled, fightin' the air like an idjut. Bunk just kept leading him on and on, till Grouchy probably must have thought all he had to do was to foller. And then, on a sudden, like a flash of lightnin', Bunk tapped him right on the snoot—bang!—like a sledgehammer, and the blood rushed all over him and blinded him. He didn't do a thing but waved his fists in the air, and then Bunky—like that—whack! whack! all over him, till he turned like a shot dog and went down. That's

the time my hundred was gone. By the way, you know, Norton is waitin'——

THE MAYOR (*jumps from the table as if struck*). Confound you, why haven't you told me? You keep me here with your stories, while Norton is out there! Call him quick!

MESSENGER. Yes, sir. (*Exit.*)

Enter the "boss," Norton. He is a man of about 55, *fat and powerful. His face is knotted and gnarled, and his complexion is florid to a purplish tinge. His little eyes are deep-set, and appear like two pieces of ice. His dress is of the latest cut. A large diamond stud ornaments his bosom, and he wears diamond rings and seals on his fingers. A tall silk hat towers over his head. He smokes a cigar continually, even while speaking.*

THE MAYOR (*with great politeness and humility*). How do you do, Mr. Norton. Won't you take a seat? (*They shake hands.*)

MR. NORTON (*sitting down heavily*). How do you do, sir; how do you do?

Enter McNulty, as if after some papers. A single glance from Norton, and the lad fades away from the room as if by magic.

MR. NORTON (*in a very gruff voice*). One has to wait a devilish long while out there nowadays. (*Clears his throat.*) Sit down, White; let's get down to business at once.

THE MAYOR (*taking a seat humbly*). What is the trouble, Mr. Norton?

MR. NORTON. Trouble? Plenty of trouble! That's a devilish mess you've brewed. Personal appointment, too. It's enough to make one sick. And

much as I have tried to keep you going right, you will go wrong every time. And what the devil ever put it into your head to appoint that silk-stocking idiot?

THE MAYOR. You mean Dr. Bensal?

MR. NORTON. H'm! You know who I am referring to, at least. That's great. By Heaven, White, get him out quick. He'll ruin us all. He'll put you into a hole from which you'll never crawl out. Get him out quick and be over with it.

THE MAYOR. That's a mighty hard proposition, Mr. Norton. How in the world can I? The term of probation is over. I'd have to prefer charges. And where am I going to get them?

MR. NORTON. Don't be a fool, White. I don't give a hang how you do it, but you've got to do it, and that's enough said. Now, mind you, Norton is a friend to you, and Norton knows what he's talking about. There will probably be a committee from the Merchants and Manufacturers' Association to see you about that matter this morning. Tell them YES. You understand? Yes, gentlemen, is the word. And, moreover, mean what you say, and stand by your word afterwards.

THE MAYOR. But how in the world——

MR. NORTON. If you find any trouble, just come to me. But I want you to begin doing things on your own hook. Let me see what you can do in this instance. Prove yourself a man for once. And now, good morning! (*Rises and shakes the Mayor's hand.*)

THE MAYOR. Mr. Norton——

MR. NORTON. Good by. See you later. Let me know how you get along.

Exit Mr. Norton. Enter the messenger.

THE MAYOR. Call up Dr. Bensal. I want him here immediately.

The Mayor strolls about the room, while the messenger is calling the Health Commissioner by telephone.

MESSENGER. He'll be here in a few minutes.

THE MAYOR. Confound that silk-stocking fool. Just let him come here. By Jingo, I'll make him jump!

MESSENGER. Dr. Beacon asked to accept his respects.

THE MAYOR. Where is he?

MESSENGER. He's been out there a minute ago.

THE MAYOR. If he is still there, call him in.

Exit messenger. A few moments later Dr. Beacon appears.

THE MAYOR (*all happiness and cordiality*). Hello, Beacon! How is my good old friend? (*Advances to shake his hand.*)

DR. BEACON. Pretty well, thank you. How are you?

THE MAYOR. Be seated. I am in trouble, Beacon.

DR. BEACON. In trouble again?

THE MAYOR (*gravely*). Beacon, I hope you are convinced that I have done my best to please you, and that as a friend I am capable of sacrifices?

DR. BEACON. I am sure of that, Mr. White.

THE MAYOR. Don't call me Mister White. To you my name is Jim. Jim—you understand.

DR. BEACON. Well, then, Jim, what is your trouble?

THE MAYOR (*almost in a whisper*) Beacon, our friend Bensal has turned out to be a fool.

DR. BEACON. Don't say so (*he smiles contentedly*).

THE MAYOR (*encouraged by Dr. Beacon's good humor*). A downright fool, upon my word! Why, he's aroused against himself the entire camorra of taxpayers, the whole bunch of crooks!

DR. BEACON. Really? What have they done?

THE MAYOR. What have they done? Nothing in particular, of course. They have simply persisted in their crooked ways, the same as always. Better ask what *he* has done.

DR. BEACON. What has he done?

THE MAYOR. He has made an attempt to cure a disease by boiling the patient. He has interdicted the sale of rotten food stuffs; has ordered whole blocks of pestilent shanties to be pulled down; he has started a project for municipal milk dispensaries which, since it is not chimerical, is all the more dangerous for that very reason—it is a move in the direction of raising the tax-rate, and you know what that means.

DR. BEACON. Too bad, too bad.

THE MAYOR. Now, I don't mean to say that I do not approve of Dr. Bensal's ideas; but do you know what we should need for their successful realization?

DR. BEACON. What?

THE MAYOR. The absolute control over an army of at least one million picked men, with a dozen or so dreadnoughts, equipped with the latest twelve-inch guns, and ordnance and supplies to suffice for a continuous bombardment during a period of one hundred years!

DR. BEACON. Is it as bad as all that?

THE MAYOR. I am not exaggerting one iota. Re-

member, we are dealing here with the taxpayers.

DR. BEACON. Oh, to be sure.

THE MAYOR. Now, George, you understand my situation. Can you advise me what I am to do?

DR. BEACON. Perhaps if you explain these things to Dr. Bensal——

THE MAYOR. This is just what I intend to do. But what if he persists in his course?

DR. BEACON. I really don't see what you could do in that case, except to ask him to resign.

THE MAYOR (*surprised and delighted*). On my word, George, you are a dear fellow. But what if he should refuse to resign? You know the term of probation is over, and I really haven't anything against Dr. Bensal——from a legal point of view. If he should refuse, it would be a matter of extreme difficulty to compel him to resign. Besides, to be frank with you, I rather like Dr. Bensal personally, and wouldn't care to make things unpleasant for him.

DR. BEACON. I don't apprehend any necessity of going to extremes. Dr. Bensal is a sensible fellow.

THE MAYOR. It is a pity. A good man! George, I tell you, that amid a cringing, a fawning and flattering bunch of rags—mere rags—it is very refreshing to see a man with the backbone of Dr. Bensal. 'Tis a pity to sacrifice such a man. But politics is politics. The welfare of the crook above everything.

Enter the messenger.

MESSENGER. The Commissioner of Health is here.

THE MAYOR. Now, good by, my boy, and thank you. I shall see you by and by. (*Shakes Dr. Beacon's*

hand.) By this door, please. (*Leads him toward the private entrance.*)

DR. BEACON. Good by, Mr. Mayor. (*Exit.*)

THE MAYOR. A first-class fellow, that Beacon, upon my word. Now, you say Dr. Bensal is here?

MESSENGER. And a committee, too, of the Merchants and Manufacturers' Association.

THE MAYOR. Confound it, I don't know what to tell them. But I'll make that fool jump. He certainly has got us into a hole.

MESSENGER. And the chief, too, Mr. Norton, looked to me out of sorts——

THE MAYOR. McNulty, you keep your mouth shut.

MESSENGER. Don't be mad, boss. McNulty is always earnin *his* salt aroun' this office. If you have any difference with the Health Commissioner, why don't you consult McNulty? He can tell you a thing or two now and then; you ought to have known that from experience.

THE MAYOR (*undecided*). What have you got up your sleeve? Come now, out with it!

MESSENGER. Oh, not much; only I seen Dr. Scringer last night at the scrap, and he talked to me. And I think I can show you a way of getting rid of the highbrow as easy as swallerin' a straight.

They go to the rear of the stage and speak inaudibly for a couple of minutes. The Mayor is evidently very much amused. At the end of the conversation he laughs boisterously, and slaps the messenger on the back.

THE MAYOR. Ho! ho! ho! ho! Is this what the highbrow is up to? Ho! ho! ho! McNulty, don't let

the hundred you've lost last night worry you. I'll see that you get it back one way or another. By the gods, boy, you are worth your weight in plum pudding! Ho! ho! ho! There won't be any difficulty with committees now. Yes, that will be my answer—yes, gentlemen! But look here, McNulty—mum! Now you understand me—absolutely and unequivocally mum! Should I find that you have so much as uttered a word on the subject to anyone—no matter who it may be—I'll put you on the scrap-heap, or my name isn't White.

MESSENGER. Don't worry, boss. McNulty knows his business better than you think he does. Shall I call the Commissioner now?

THE MAYOR. Just wait a minute. Here—can I trust you with a delicate matter?

MESSENGER. Go ahead, Mr. Mayor; and mind, McNulty knows where his bread and butter lays.

THE MAYOR. Look here. Get here Mrs. Bensal—by this door (*points to the private door.*) Have her ready by the time I am through with the committee. But mind—she must not be seen.

MESSENGER. All right, sir. All you've got to do is to say so—I understand the rest. You won't be very long with Dr. Bensal?

THE MAYOR. Only a few minutes. Now send him in and fade away.

Exit the messenger. The Mayor gets into his seat, behind the desk. A remarkable change takes place in his appearance. His countenance assumes the sober and staid expression of the statesman. All of his movements become slow and deliberate. His very Prince Albert appears to have smoothed itself out and become longer. The Mayor's voice, in the conversa-

tions which follow, is several notes lower, and his utterances are marked with a conciseness and gravity which harmonize in a remarkable manner with his general aspect. In the space of a few seconds Jimmy White is transformed into the respectable, respected, suave, serious, firm, sensible and politic Mayor White.

Enter Dr. Bensal. The Mayor rises, advances to meet him, and shakes hands with him.

THE MAYOR. Good morning, Dr. Bensal; good morning. Come here, take a seat.

DR. BENSAL. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. (*They both take seats.*) How are you this morning?

THE MAYOR. Fine, thank you. Have a cigar, Doctor. (*Hands him a cigar, takes one for himself and strikes a match.*) Have a light. (*He holds the lighted match to Dr. Bensal's cigar, then lights his own.*) Now, then, Dr. Bensal, I understand you are having a little trouble with some of our taxpayers?

DR. BENSAL. Yes; quite a little. A number of them stubbornly refuse to obey the health laws. I have tried every possible means of coaxing them into doing the right thing, and was compelled to institute prosecutions as a last resort.

THE MAYOR. Ah, well. I don't see what else you could do. When people treat the law with contempt, we must show them its force. Just keep it up, and have in mind that I am behind you. Your light is out. (*Lights another match and holds the flame to Dr. Bensal's cigar.*) I hope that at the end of my term there will not be a single individual who would be able to say that either fear or favor played any part in the present administration. By the way, your project for municipal milk dispensaries is coming along nicely.

Here, read this. (*He hands him a document, officially backed with blue paper.*) The City Solicitor's draft of the Bill for the Establishment of Municipal Milk Dispensaries. I just received it this morning, and I want you to tell me what you think of it.

DR. BENSAL (*after having perused the document carefully*). Excellently drawn. Just the thing. (*Returns the document to the Mayor.*)

THE MAYOR (*folding the paper and tapping it with his fingers.*) Isn't it? (*Winking significantly to Dr. Bensal.*) We'll push it, too. You just work your end of it with the profession. I'll attend to the political part of it. How is the typhoid situation?

DR. BENSAL. Well in hand. This month's report will show a remarkable falling off in the number of cases.

THE MAYOR. That is all, then. I am very glad you are satisfied with the draft of the bill. Good morning, Doctor. Take good care of yourself.

DR. BENSAL. Thank you. Good morning.

They shake hands. Exit Dr. Bensal. The Mayor opens the door and calls:

THE MAYOR. Come in, gentlemen, if you please.

Enter the committee of the Merchants and Manufacturers' Association—Mr. Adams, Mr. Jones, First, Second and Third Prominent Citizens.

THE MAYOR. Good morning, gentlemen; I am very glad to see you here. Be seated, please.

THE COMMITTEE. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. (*They all shake hands.*)

THE MAYOR. What can I do for you, gentlemen?

MR. ADAMS. It is a matter of extreme impor-

tance. We come to ask you to intercede in behalf of the business interests of the city, knowing, as we do, that you have always had those interests at heart.

THE MAYOR. At all times.

MR. ADAMS. To be direct, then, we believe that the Health Department, or, to be more precise, the present Health Commissioner, is dealing unfairly with the business and property interests of this city.

THE MAYOR (*with evident surprise*). Dr. Bensal?

MR. ADAMS. Dr. Bensal. We do not mean to impute to him any wrong motives for his actions. On the contrary, we must acknowledge that he is entirely given to the interests of the department in his charge. But business is the life-blood of the community. Any measure that will in any way interfere with the business life of the city, is an injury to the city.

THE MAYOR. Perfectly correct.

MR. ADAMS. Take, for instance, the case of Mr. Jones. He conducts a large wholesale grocery establishment. Now, every one knows that in any business there are commodities of various grades, from the most expensive to the cheapest. Dr. Bensal maintains that all the cheaper varieties of food-stuffs must be banished from the market. What happens? Mr. Jones leaves this city and establishes himself elsewhere, where he can conduct his business unmolested. Who is the loser? Our city, of course. Who is the gainer? Some other city. Or take the case of Dr. Anderson, foremost in the medical profession of our city. He owns a number of tenement houses. Now, dwelling is a commodity, the same as any other commodity. There are very costly dwellings and there are very cheap

dwellings. Dr. Anderson deals in the cheaper grade of the commodity. There is a demand for the cheaper grade, and the market must be supplied. But Dr. Bensal puts a ban on the cheaper grade of dwellings. What is the result? Dr. Anderson invests his capital in some other enterprise, perhaps in railway or tobacco stocks. Who is the loser by exactly so much capital? Our city again. Who is the gainer? Some out-of-state corporation perhaps! And so on, from A to Z. The power which a Health Commissioner possesses is tremendous. One man can put the city fifty years back, if he has the inclination to do so. Mr. Mayor, you've always stood for progress. The Merchants and Manufacturers' Association wishes to know whether progress can be made under these conditions?

MR. JONES. Also whether you approve of the confiscatory course which the Health Commissioner is pursuing?

FIRST PROMINENT CITIZEN. We would like to know what you are going to do for the protection of our property.

THIRD PROMINENT CITIZEN. Mr. Mayor, it depends upon you whether or not our labors of waging an advertising campaign throughout the country for the benefit of our city shall be frustrated by the actions of one man, and business and capital not only not be attracted, but actually driven from the city.

THE MAYOR. Have you anything else to say, gentlemen?

MR. ADAMS. We do not care to take up your valuable time. I think we have expressed the sentiment of the merchants and manufacturers of our city

to the best of our ability. Our duty is done. We rest the matter with you.

THE MAYOR. Very well, then, gentlemen. Take my hearty thanks to the Association for calling my attention to those matters. I am fully aware of their importance. I hope I shall be able to demonstrate to the business elements that the present administration is thoroughly imbued with the progressive spirit which at present animates our city. I shall investigate this matter rigorously, and at once, and if I find that things are as you have represented them to me, the remedy will follow with certainty and dispatch. I have a very high opinion of Dr. Bensal. He is a man of science of the first order; he is honest and upright; and there is not a shadow of doubt in my mind that, whatever his actions may be with regard to practicability, he means well and his motives are pure. I sincerely trust that you agree with me on this point.

THE COMMITTEE. Perfectly. Beyond a doubt. Absolutely so.

The Mayor rises. The committee follow his example.

THE MAYOR. Good morning, then, gentlemen. You shall hear from me soon. (*He shakes the hand of each. Exeunt the committee. The Mayor strolls about the room several times. Enter the messenger.*)

MESSENGER. Ready, boss?

THE MAYOR (*as if suddenly awakened*). Ready for what?

MESSENGER. For the lady.

THE MAYOR. Oh—is she there? Has anyone seen her?

MESSENGER. Not a soul. Don't be uneasy. Shall I take her in?

THE MAYOR. Go ahead—wait a minute—all right; let her in.

Exit messenger. The Mayor stands restively. Enter Mrs. Bensal by the private door. She remains motionless a few seconds. The Mayor approaches her and extends his hand. Mrs. Bensal casts a glance at him and turns away her head.

THE MAYOR (*taking her hand*). Peace; let us bury our hatchets.

MRS. BENSAL (*weakly.*) Never! Never!

THE MAYOR. It is enough. Have I not sufficiently demonstrated my devotion to you?

MRS. BENSAL. You? When?

THE MAYOR. Even when I appointed your husband to the office of Health Commissioner against almost impossible odds.

MRS. BENSAL. Oh! I did not know. Many thanks, of course. I suppose your political dictionary has taught you this manner of interpreting devotion to a woman—by giving her husband a political job!

THE MAYOR. However you take it, it is nevertheless true that at a time when, perhaps, the thought of me never entered your mind, I have been watching over your welfare. Under the circumstances I could find no other way of proving to you that you occupied a prominent place in my thoughts, and I grasped the first opportunity which presented itself.

MRS. BENSAL. You could find no other way—in above three years.

THE MAYOR. Let me confess. I simply dared not see you. Your furious outburst at our last meeting——

Mrs. Bensal applies her handkerchief to her eyes.

THE MAYOR. But enough, enough (*takes her by the hand.*) Here, let us sit down and talk over matters. (*Leads her to a seat and moves a chair for himself opposite her.*) Tell me, are you happier now than you had been? Now that you can afford to live a little better?

MRS. BENSAL. Ah! What is there in that? No, no, no! There is no happiness. Day follows day with a sameness which is at times exasperating. There is nothing interesting in my life. The monotony is unbearable!

THE MAYOR. And your husband?

MRS. BENSAL. He—he is Commissioner of Health now.

THE MAYOR. What is there in that?

MRS. BENSAL. To him—everything. Everything—you understand? It had been the University and bacteria before; now it is the Health Department and—sewers.

THE MAYOR (*in a low voice*). And I thought that an improvement in circumstances—material circumstances—would make you happier. Still, he loves you, does he not?

MRS. BENSAL. What are you talking about? Dr. Bensal—love! Give him bacteria and sewers; that is all he needs.

THE MAYOR. How strange—it was my impression that he was rather susceptible to——

MRS. BENSAL (*with sudden eagerness*). You have something in mind—tell me what it is!

THE MAYOR. Calm yourself; nothing in particular, I assure you.

MRS. BENSAL. You have called me on some purpose; what is it?

THE MAYOR. If you want my confidence you must promise me to be deliberate and calm. You are too impetuous. If I cannot spare you any unpleasantness, surely, I don't want to be the cause of any.

MRS. BENSAL. What is it? Tell me. I promise to be calm.

THE MAYOR (*taking her hand*). I want a favor from you. Will you render it to me?

MRS. BENSAL. What is it?

THE MAYOR. I fear Dr. Bensal is behaving a little unwisely. There is some nasty talk in the Health Department. Do you possess sufficient diplomacy and tact to hush things up in a manner that will avert—remember, by no means precipitate—a scandal?

MRS. BENSAL (*touched to the quick*). Now, look here, White; you cannot tell me that Dr. Bensal is dishonest!

THE MAYOR. No, no; of course not. Had it been merely a question of dishonesty, I could arrange matters myself well enough. But it is a matter too delicate for me to touch. But you, as his wife, are in a position ——

MRS. BENSAL (*impatiently*). I am sure it isn't anything—I mean—is isn't anything in connection with a—woman?

THE MAYOR. Well—yes, it is.

MRS. BENSAL (*pale*). Impossible!

THE MAYOR. Now, look—if it is at all possible at this late stage of the game to avert a scandal, do so. You will understand that from an official standpoint the Mayor will not be held answerable for the private behavior of the city employes. I have confided this to you in order that you may save yourself very much unpleasantness; as for the rest——

MRS. BENSAL. Tell me more about this matter. Who is the woman?

THE MAYOR. A nobody. A girl in the Health Department, his private secretary. Dr. Bensal has been very indiscreet. Very.

MRS. BENSAL. The hypocrite!

THE MAYOR. Now, remember, you promised to be calm. What are you going to do? You are not going to make any scenes, I hope? Perhaps you could make him discharge the girl—though that would hardly stop the scandal. It is quite a dilemma. You know what rumor means, especially among inferior employes, who are only too eager to discover something about their chief that they could talk about.

MRS. BENSAL. The low scoundrel! And a chief of a department, too!

THE MAYOR. That is just where the trouble comes in. Had an inferior employe acted in the same manner, no one would see anything very wrong about it. What are you going to do now?

MRS. BENSAL. He must leave the department. There is no other way.

THE MAYOR. That would make it pretty hard for me. I'd have to look for another man, and this is

quite a task. But don't consider me at all. (*Takes her hand again.*) It is a question of your reputation—and under the circumstances a nasty scandal is certain to be precipitated. But promise me to be diplomatic—to be calm. I shall see you soon.

MRS. BENSAL. Thank you, White. You will find that you can repose your confidence in me. (*Rises and extends her hand.*) Good by.

THE MAYOR (*very sad*). Good by, until we meet again.

Exit Mrs. Bensal by the private door.

THE MAYOR (*straightening himself*). Ugh! (*with disgust*). This is a damn dirty business!

Enter the messenger.

THE MAYOR (*in high spirits*). McNulty, boy, you're a peach!

Curtain.

SCENE 2.

The Health Commissioner's private office. It is late in the afternoon. The scant daylight and the prevailing quiet make the room appear gloomy and deserted. Dr. Bensal is seated behind his desk, writing and reading what he had written alternately. He then rests his forehead upon his hands, his elbows on the desk, evidently in deep thought. A number of seconds elapse in silence. A knock on the door suddenly startles him.

DR. BENSAL. Come in.

Enter the young doctor.

THE YOUNG DOCTOR. Good afternoon.

DR. BENSAL (*eagerly*). Good afternoon. Well, what news?

THE YOUNG DOCTOR. Bad. The court has decided against us—in both cases.

DR. BENSAL. What? How is it possible? Tell me all about it.

THE YOUNG DOCTOR. It seems incredible—doesn't it? I can hardly believe it myself. But really, it seems to me that the State's Attorney, instead of attacking the defendants, rather defended them and attacked me. He began by plying me with irrelevant questions. During my testimony regarding the defective drainage on the property of Lucas and Lucas, he asked me, for instance, whether my three years' hospital service afforded me sufficient training in civil engineering to enable me to judge regarding matters of drainage.

DR. BENSAL. What was your answer?

THE YOUNG DOCTOR. I told him that my training as a physician enabled me to judge what constituted a menace to public health, and that it was the business of Lucas and Lucas to engage engineers to devise means for draining their property. But it was no use. The State's Attorney asked my pardon and said he was under the impression that the whole matter would more properly fall into the domain of civil engineering.

DR. BENSAL. Has he cross-examined the witnesses for defense—I mean Lucas and Lucas?

THE YOUNG DOCTOR. Yes; he asked them what was their standing in the community; how much they've paid in taxes to the city the last twenty-five years; how much they contributed toward the charities; what the profits were on the houses, and all that sort of rot.

DR. BENSAL. And what about the Jones case?

THE YOUNG DOCTOR. Pretty much the same. The State's Attorney asked me whether a chemical analysis was made by the Health Department of certain kippered herrings, to ascertain whether they contained poison. I tried to explain that the poisons contained in the herrings were not analysable with our present means, that they were ptomains, products of decomposition. He then asked me whether I had brought witnesses to testify that some people had been poisoned by eating that stuff. Both cases were dismissed.

DR. BENSAL. Dismissed!

THE YOUNG DOCTOR. That isn't the worst of it.

DR. BENSAL. What else?

THE YOUNG DOCTOR. Before rendering his verdict the judge held quite a little speech. He said that in the future the Health Department must be more careful in handling similar cases. That such a course was bound to cause injury to reputable business people and redound detrimentally to the community.

DR. BENSAL (*rises and strolls across the room*). I wonder what we could do now?

THE YOUNG DOCTOR. I really don't see what we could do. The State's Attorney is against us, the court is against us.

DR. BENSAL. But the law! The law!

THE YOUNG DOCTOR. What good will the law do us when the lawyers are all against us?

DR. BENSAL (*approaches the desk and finishes resolutely the paper he had written*). Call Dr. Scringer.

Exit the young doctor. Dr. Bensal stands, supporting himself with his right hand against the desk. Enter Dr. Scringer.

DR. BENSAL. Dr. Scringer, will you please take charge of the office tomorrow morning? You will receive your orders from the Mayor.

DR. SCRINGER. All right. Is that all?

DR. BENSAL. This is all. Good evening, Doctor.

Exit Dr. Scringer.

DR. BENSAL. So. The law, too, is gone. Let me see what else is there. (*He opens the door and calls.*) Miss Clemens! (*No reply.*) Miss Clemens! (*He waits a few seconds and then put his head through the door*). Miss Clemens, will you come in, please?

Enter Miss Clemens, all dressed for going out. Dr. Bensal shuts the door behind her. He does not speak for some seconds, and paces up and down the room, as if trying to collect his thoughts.

MISS CLEMENS. What do you wish, Doctor?

DR. BENSAL (*stops, confused and distressed*). I really don't know.

MISS CLEMENS. May I go, then?

DR. BENSAL. Just one minute. (*Takes the paper he had written.*) Read this.

MISS CLEMENS (*scans the paper and puts it away with the utmost indifference*). Well——

DR. BENSAL. Have you nothing to say?

MISS CLEMENS. Really, Doctor, that is your business——

DR. BENSAL. Is that all you have to say to me? Miss Clemens, you are a different person. I cannot recognize you. What has happened to you?

MISS CLEMENS. Please, Doctor, let me go.

DR. BENSAL. But you will be here tomorrow?

MISS CLEMENS. No, no! This is final! Good evening, now, Dr. Bensal.

DR. BENSAL. Miss Clemens, one minute—I beg of you!

MISS CLEMENS (*with impatience*). Dr. Bensal, you are a fool!

DR. BENSAL (*deeply wounded, almost staggering*). Miss Clemens—this is—this is—extremely cruel of you. (*He supports himself against the desk with his hand.*) Extremely cruel! (*Suddenly he recovers.*) No, no—I beg your pardon—that is not what I wanted to say. Miss Clemens, you are a—coward! A coward! A coward! Ah, this shocks you! You thought you could take advantage of the fact that you are an employe and I your employer; that I am a man and you a frail girl? Oh, you hypocrites and weaklings! Your beautiful ideals are like soap bubbles—there is no substance to them; they go to pieces the moment they are threatened to be made use of!

MISS CLEMENS (*touched to the quick*). Dr. Bensal, what would you have me do? I am only a poor girl; I have to make my own way. My reputation is at stake.

DR. BENSAL. Your reputation! My God, how terrible it is! Nothing but cowardice and sham all around! And everything is at stake. Here it is business which is at stake, there the Charities, and here a reputation again! And so everything remains fixed. Not a particle must be dislodged from the fixed mass, or else the whole mass is in danger of being

jarred. But a jarring is just what it needs, in order to impart to it motion! Don't you see that society has become a fixed mass of rock owing to the loss of mobility of its parts? It must be disturbed, disturbed at any cost, else growth and progress are impossible. Impossible! It is a fixed mass! Do you see what you are doing? You are helping society maintain itself in its fixed state. And your beautiful ideals! Like the ideals of our philanthropists—mere coloring! (*He stops, almost panting from the rapidity of utterance.*)

MISS CLEMENS. But what can I do?

DR. BENSAL. Anything that will disengage you from the hold of the dead mass—anything at all to disturb it, to give it a shock. Stand on your head if you can do no better! It will jar the mass and impart some motion to it. You have nothing to lose! Nothing!

MISS CLEMENS. What do you want with me?

DR. BENSAL. I don't know. Let me see. Work with me. We shall devise some plan for a campaign against the prevailing state of fixity; some method of disturbing the lithificated state of our society, so that life and motion shall become possible. Do not run off in this manner! It is cowardly!

MISS CLEMENS. That is impossible. After Mrs. Bensal's outburst this afternoon you must not think of it. Why, you weren't even clever or considerate enough to spare me that terrible scene! Do you want me now to become the talk of the town?

DR. BENSAL. To be frank with you—yes! I would like to see you have the courage to smile with

contempt upon the talk of the town. This would mean that you are disengaged from its hold upon you. You would become a free being, and would impart a little jar to the town and instil some life into it. As it is, what are you? A particle of dead dust, inseparably adherent to the dead mass of rock!

MISS CLEMENS. I see. Thank you for your generosity. You would like to see me exposed to the jeers of the crowd. And then how generous it would be of you to stoop to a despised and persecuted girl at the risk of being struck by some of the stones intended for her. You are a very brave man; but don't you think you are a little too old for a Don Quixote?

DR. BENSAL (*shocked*). Miss Clemens! Is it you who are speaking? Miss Clemens—you!

MISS CLEMENS. Oh, stop playing the boy; for shame! Do you know what the trouble is with you? You are simply infatuated with me. Any woman not absolutely ugly, or stupid, or idealess would have the same effect on you. For shame, Dr. Bensal; you ought to remember that you are a married man.

DR BENSAL (*retreating a few steps, in absolute horror*). My God!

MISS CLEMENS. Good by!

DR. BENSAL. Miss Clemens! One more word!

MISS CLEMENS (*stops and turns abruptly to Dr. Bensal*). What again?

DR. BENSAL (*making an effort to gather his thoughts*). Oh—nothing, nothing!

MISS CLEMENS. Good by, then.

Dr. Bensal does not reply. Exit Miss Clemens. Dr.

Bensal remains standing in the center of the room, as if petrified. It is growing darker. The prevailing quiet is now more evident. There is an indefinite air of desolation about the place. Suddenly approaching steps are heard outside, and the lively voices of Dr. and Mrs. Beacon. A second later there is a knock on the door.)

MRS. BEACON (*after reading the paper*). Oh,

DR. BENSAL (*without moving*). Come in.

Enter Dr. and Mrs. Beacon.

MRS. BEACON. Good evening, Dr. Bensal.

DR. BEACON. Hello, Charlie! How's tricks?

DR. BENSAL. Good evening. (*They shake hands.*)

DR. BEACON. Where is Mary?

DR. BENSAL. She left a few minutes ago—for good.

DR. BEACON. What? She has left for good, you say? Why?

DR. BENSAL (*with utter disgust*). Nothing but cowardice. Mrs. Bensal must have said something unpleasant to her.

Mrs. Beacon darts a look at her husband, which speaks: What did I tell you? Dr. Bensal takes the paper he had written from the desk and hands it to Dr. Beacon.

DR. BENSAL. Read this.

DR. BEACON (*scans the paper and throws up his hands*). What? What has happened?

DR. BENSAL. Mrs. Bensal insisted upon it.

DR. BEACON (*to Mrs. Beacon*). Look at this, dear. (*He hands her the paper.*)

nonsense! I shall see Mrs. Bensal and straighten matters out.

DR. BENSAL. No, thank you. (*Presses a bell button. He then takes the paper, puts it in an envelope and addresses it. Enter the watchman.*) Here, mail this at once.

THE WATCHMAN (*taking the letter*). Yes, sir. (*Exit.*)

DR. BEACON. But why have you resigned?

DR. BENSAL. Because Mrs. Bensal has given her consent to it.

DR. BEACON. What do you mean?

DR. BENSAL. She came like an angel-deliverer, just in the right moment. She insisted that I resign. Of course, she had her own reasons. These are not important. She merely hastened my resignation by a day or two.

DR. BEACON. You would have resigned anyhow, then? I suppose the Mayor——

DR. BENSAL. No; it was not the Mayor. On the contrary, he backed me in everything I did. The fact is, a city department cannot exist in the absence of all law.

DR. BEACON. In the absence of all law? Haven't we law enough?

DR. BENSAL. It is a fib, George. We have no law at all; we have lawyers.

DR. BEACON. Well—what are you going to do now? Hunt bacteria again?

DR. BENSAL. No. There is something more important that I must do.

DR. BEACON. What is it?

DR. BENSAL (*with determination*). The disintegration of the rocky rind in which our society is bound up. The living tissue of our society, while growing and developing, has, at the same time, been depositing a rind of protection upon its surface. That rind has become hard and dry as stone. Further growth and expansion of the living tissues are impossible before the rind is broken away.

DR. BEACON. What is that rind?

DR. BENSAL. I will tell you. The species of man has been favored in its development by the manifestation of the ethical instinct. That instinct is like a protecting membrance to the cell, or like the rind on the orange. As long as it is alive and grows and expands with the growth of the fruit, it is a protection. But the moment it dies, and becomes hard and fixed, it becomes a hindrance to the further growth of the fruit within. We have grown in the spirit of humanity, and that spirit served as a protection to the development of human society. But the spirit of humanity has at last become fixed and dry—it has become our charity institution—a hard, unyielding rind, which hinders the growth of the living tissue of human society. We have grown in the spirit of politeness, but that spirit has at last become converted into the unyielding rind of conventionality. We have grown to respect the property of our fellows, but that respect for the property of others has at last contracted into a hard crust—the adoration of property in the abstract. The rind has become rock. It presses upon the living tissue within, it strangles the vessels, cuts off the circulation of the living fluids, and cause death and decomposition.

That which had at one time been a protection has, by a process of condensation, become a hindrance to the further growth and progress of human society. One of the two must happen, as surely as the day follows night: either the rind of our institutionalism must be burst and thrown off or human society will die.

DR. BEACON. Bensal, that rind, I understand, is pretty thick and strong; it will take you a long while to break it away.

DR. BENSAL. It will take some generations. But the work must be begun, and I shall begin it. If in my lifetime I shall succeed in so much as inflicting upon it ever so tiny a dent, I shall not have lived in vain.

DR. BEACON. But that will not furnish you with the means of making your livelihood. A man must live.

DR. BENSAL. I have heard that before! I shall find the means. If need be I shall dig ditches.

DR. BEACON. Dig ditches? You, a gentleman!

DR. BENSAL. Dr. Anderson is a gentleman; so is Mr. Adams, and Mr. Jones—and they all must live! And they live by hardening and condensing the rocky crust which blocks all progress, which causes death and decomposition! To the devil, then, with Bensal the gentleman! I am not one any longer, if I have to dig ditches to prove it! (*He presses a button on the wall and the room is suddenly brightly lighted with electric lights.*)

Dr. Beacon throws himself on his wife and begins to hug her in a most shocking manner.

MRS. BEACON (*making an effort to disengage herself*). George, are you crazy? (*Frees herself.*) What has happened to you?

DR. BEACON (*laughs and claps his hands like a little boy*). My dear—hear him—only hear him! He's come of age—he is swearing! Ho! ho! ho! ho! (*He approaches Dr. Bensal, gazes at him intently, walks a few steps backward and gazes at him again. He then walks in a semi-circle about the room and scrutinizes Dr. Bensal on the right and left, finally remaining opposite him, half a dozen steps away.*)

DR. BENSAL. What is the trouble with you?

Dr. Beacon runs forward, gets hold of Dr. Bensal's both shoulders, shakes him vigorously a few times, and then gazes straight into his face, with eyes almost filled with tears—due, perhaps, to his inordinate laughing.

DR. BEACON. Are you Charlie Bensal?

DR. BENSAL (*smiling involuntarily*). Of course I am.

Dr. Beacon puts his arms around Dr. Bensal and pats him lovingly.

DR. BEACON. My dear, dear boy! (*Approaches his wife.*) Bessie, sweet girl, will you please remind me on our way home to stop in at the newspaper offices?

MRS. BEACON. What for?

DR. BEACON. To insert an ad. Here (*he sits down at the desk, tears off a sheet of paper from a blank pad, and writes and then reads aloud.*) Dr. Beacon's practice for sale; office, furniture, fixtures,

instruments and good-will. The practice is worth $20,000 a year to the right man.

MRS. BEACON (*delighted*). George, dear!

DR. BEACON. And now we'll fall to work—all three of us, and more by and by. We'll have all the fun in the world, Charles. Phew! It's going to be a hot fight! We shall hew away at the rock, and scoop the rotten stuff as never curette scooped into dead bone!

DR. BENSAL. By Jove, George, you haven't grown a minute older the last twenty years.

DR. BEACON (*to Mrs. Beacon*). Do you hear that, Bessie? Better keep this in mind and take care.

MRS. BEACON. And Mary, too, will come to work with us.

DR. BEACON (*pensively*). In time, perhaps; not just yet. Now, go we.

They make ready to go. Curtain.

THE END.

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